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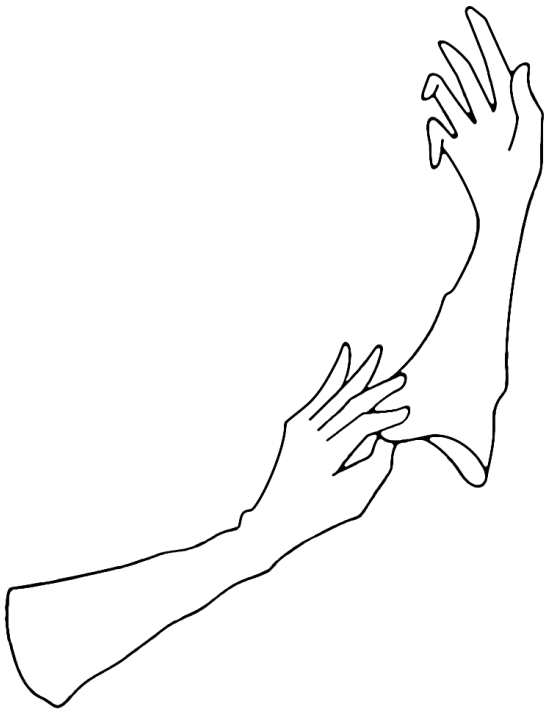

# Lived Things

# Materialities of Agency, Affect, and Meaning in the Short Fiction of Djuna Barnes and Jean Rhys

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by due permission of the Faculty of Arts, at the University of Helsinki in lecture room 5 on the 6th of June, 2018 at 12 o'clock.

# Abstract

The short fiction of Djuna Barnes (1892–1982) and Jean Rhys (1890–1979) conveys intense moments of human characters interacting with material things. Clothes and furniture along with other material items, both human-made and of the natural world, have central roles in how the stories invite both interpretation and affective response. This is part of the way the two writers draw upon and develop modernist ideas and aesthetics, focus on lived experience and challenge the borders between the individual and the world, the human and the nonhuman. The form of short fiction allows for especially intense depictions of fleeting moments of experience. This study analyzes the way material things are present in such moments, and discusses their roles in the evocation of spatiality and temporality, their fictional agency and their part in literary affectivity and meaning-making.

Barnes's and Rhys's stories invite sociocultural interpretations related to issues such as commodification and consumerism, marginality and belonging, and gendered power relations. This study explores the ways in which such interpretations are produced by narrative experientiality, especially the evocation of embodied, affective experiences of material things. With the help of theoretical insights into embodied cognitive narratology and new materialist thinking, the analyses investigate the ways in which cultural values suggested by the texts are entangled with basic, embodied experiences of being in the material world, and the ways such experiences can be evoked in the reader.

The study shows how paying attention to the entanglements of the material and the cultural, humans and things, open new possibilities of interpretation and shift readers' understanding of modernist fiction and the experientiality of stories, and how the stories in turn can shed light on the real-world relations between the human and the nonhuman. The analyses suggest a broader inclusion of materiality and worldly experience within the interpretation of Barnes's and Rhys's work and within canonized modernism. The attention to experienced materialities offers additional support especially for readings that focus on the stories' reparative potential as regards their point of view on agency and subjecthood and their evocation of positive affect, yet it also allows for the pairing of these affirmative tones with the recognition of the critical potential of the works. The analyses contribute to the discussion of narrative experientiality by highlighting it as an embodied phenomenon rooted in the material world.

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# Introduction

# 1 Introduction

A woman from Martinique stands in the middle of a room in a shabby London flat, holding her best dress in her arms and crying. A commandant is going through the cabinets in the Paris flat of her deceased young lover to take some of her possessions to her mother, when a big block of white marble crashes down out of nowhere in the adjacent room. A man, dressed in an evening suit and a top hat is crawling through the undergrowth around a country house. A child is lying in the middle of a large bed, making a buzzing noise, surrounded by a disorder involving an enormous stove and bookshelves, and a painting of a war scene with charging horses.

These are all scenes in short stories written by Jean Rhys (1890–1979) and Djuna Barnes (1892–1982). They are not necessarily the most important turning points, or the only defining moments in the stories, yet they all convey a powerful sense of meaningful experience that might stick with a reader as an image or a feeling, after leaving the story behind, and even after forgetting the names of characters or the general plotline. All these moments feature human characters interacting with *things*, that is, material, inanimate objects: clothes, interior fabrics, bookshelves, a painting, and a mysterious block of marble reminiscent of a tombstone. The initial motivation behind this study is the insight that things have an important role to play in such affective moments in Barnes's and Rhys's fiction, so much so that to view them merely as background and props for the action of the stories is to overlook their possible importance. Sometimes even the idea that things surround characters might be a product of habitual human-centered thinking: it could equally well be said that characters surround or gather around things. Material things help to shape characters' identities, provide indirect symbolic allusions, and convey information about historical time, for instance. However, pointing out these tasks, which are the ones usually allotted to things in the study of literature, does not completely account for their importance in these stories. Firstly, material things can equally well be seen as agents in their own right, changing the course of the narratives, and affecting their characters as well as their readers; secondly, human beings interact with the world of things through the senses, and it is this fictionally-evoked sense experience that is often strongly connected to the memorable instances of the stories.

Human lives, especially in the industrialized world, are populated by material things of various kinds; for this simple reason, their presence cannot be escaped in fiction about such lives. The clothes people wear, the chairs, tables, tools and machines that surrounded them daily constantly affect their bodies through the senses, and affect

the ways they act in the world. Experiences of happiness, belonging, anxiety, and fear are accompanied by things whose presence, like these feelings, are felt in the body. Human beings are bound not only to what phenomenologist call the 'lived body', but also to the material world in which this subjectively felt, acting body is situated, among other, nonhuman bodies. Therefore, the title of this study suggests that the experience of being-in-the-world as a lived body is accompanied and partly defined by lived things occupying the space of living, and that this aspect of material things becomes highlighted in the short fiction of Djuna Barnes and Jean Rhys.

Why do material things appear so central for conveying lived experience in these particular stories, and how, exactly, are they used to this effect? The aim of this study is to investigate how material things, as part of experiences evoked in a fictional world, contribute to the possibilities of readerly experience of Rhys and Barnes's short fiction. How do readers get a "feel" for the materialities, and how does this affect their interpretations and understanding of the texts and their meanings and values? The subtitle, *Materialities of Agency, Affect, and Meaning*, points toward the more detailed questions and approaches that determine the course of the study. What kind of agency do material things have in the stories, and how do they participate in the activities of human agents? What is their role in affective encounters and relations in the fictional world, and how do they contribute to the potential evocation of readerly feelings and emotions? How do material things participate in the production of meaning in the stories and the processes of sense-making and interpretation involved in reading them?

While human experience remains essential, especially for the discussion of reading in this study, a general aim is also to give as much room as possible to the things themselves, without conflating them functionally with characters and other human elements. Experientiality, agency, affectivity, and meaning-making will prove to be phenomena and practices that involve both human and nonhuman agents. To provide the attention that the things in Rhys's and Barnes's work seem to demand for themselves, phenomenologically and cognitively motivated approaches to literature and reading are combined with "new materialist" thinking in philosophy and cultural studies that investigates the ways human culture and experience are entangled in different nonhuman materialities. These approaches are in line with the feminist interest of this study, recognizing that the experience of materialities is always already a gendered phenomenon, and that attention to such experience also reveals how the writers depict what it is like to be in the material world as a woman. Another important aim of the study is to remain close to the original material,

Rhys's and Barnes's stories, and appreciate the insights they provide while recognizing the value of these insights for an understanding of modernist literature, and fiction more generally. The remainder of this introductory chapter will briefly chart the texts studied and their historical and geographical context, and provide equally brief overviews of the theoretical approaches to materiality and experientiality that are most central to the study.

## 1.1 The Material World of Modernist Short Fiction

Historically considered, modernist fiction is an intriguing arena for studying material things and human engagement with them. The first decades of the 20th century especially in the Western world mark the intensification of mass production of goods of all kinds, meaning an increase in both the number and variety of things owned, used and desired by people. The 1920s, the decade during which the majority of texts studied here were written, was a period of relative economic stability after the First World War and before the Great Depression, which meant an increase in the number of people identifiable as *consumers*. Consumerism brought with it a new kind of relation to things, highlighting many of them as purchasable and perishable commodities *en masse*, and created a difference between things of this kind and more singular art objects or things on display in a museum, such as those that Walter Benjamin described as being in possession of an "aura" of authenticity (Benjamin 1936).[1] According to Georg Lukács, commodification conceals the thing in its actual or authentic materiality: "things as things" (Lukács 1971a, 92; Brown 2013, 282). Consumership was also a new mode of subjectivity available especially to women (see Wilson 2007, 77–79).

This consumer culture can be seen especially in Rhys's writing, which deals predominantly with commodities, while Barnes's work often presents things as residues of an ambiguous past era, or as otherwise singular items like museum objects or theatre props. For the discussion of both writers' texts, the tension between commodities and authentic objects is relevant, but their employment of things, especially the *lived things* of interest in this study, is not reducible to these distinctions. Researchers have also pointed out a "heightened sensitivity to sensation" as central to modern experience, brought about by developments in science and technology, in addition to a new understanding of the senses and new ways to interact with them

1 The beginnings of mass production are already present in the 19th century, which Bill Brown (2003, 5) calls the "age of things."

(Armstrong 2005, 90). This phenomenon is parallel to the advent of commodity and consumer culture and the new encounters of lived experience of rapid change and material stuff (see Boscagli 2014, 270). It shows in modernist artists' interest in subjectivity and experience, as well as the material world as the object and product of sense experience, even though these two might at first seem quite opposite. In "Modern Fiction," Virginia Woolf famously writes against "materialist" authors of the preceding generation, obsessing over the credible detailing of their fictional worlds, while praising the looser "spirituality" of the likes of Joyce (Woolf 1948, 190), and she was by no means the only one looking for alternatives to well-rounded characters and decorated worlds (Matz 2006, 216). This contradiction, however, is not as absolute as it seems; as David Herman (2011a) has shown, even the modernism of Woolf, and her interest in the world as it is experienced, actually foregrounds the lived world of the individual experiencer at least as much as her "interiority."

Paris, the place of composition and the milieu of the fictional events for many of Rhys's and Barnes's stories was, especially during the 1920s, a dynamic locus considering the world of things, being recognized as the capital of fashion and subject to imitation all over the Western world. It was also a hub for international, especially Anglophone modernism, where such writers as Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and Ernest Hemingway along with visual artists of the cubist, expressionist and surrealist strands lived, worked and were inclined toward the world of things in one way or another. In the history of ideas, things as both commodities and experienced materialities were present especially in the directions of thought inspired by Karl Marx's materialist investigations of the production and consumption of commodities, including, in addition to Benjamin and Lukács, thinkers such as Theodor Adorno and Siegfried Kracauer. A central worry for Marxist thinkers was the commodification of human individuals for economic profit, and the "reification" or "thingification" of social relationships. Another vein of thinking arising from Freudian psychoanalysis introduced new ways of discussing material things as symbolic and affective objects of desire, especially as *fetishes;* this was a central notion to both Marx's critical theory and Freud's psychoanalysis.

Writers and artists were involved in and inspired by the advent of things in consumer culture and the philosophical and psychoanalytical discussions of materiality and things. Bill Brown (2013, 282) puts it quite drastically, finding modernist artists to be "obsessed" by things. The surrealists displayed "found objects" and produced literary mystifications of banal detail for instance in Louis Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926) and André Breton's *Nadja* (1928). Italian futurist and British vorticist pictorial art displayed a different fascination with human-thing relations powered by advances in technology. A special interest in things and materialities can already be seen in Gertrude Stein's work, especially her "cubist" prose poems in *Tender Buttons* (1914); further, in the American context in the work of such

poets as William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens, there is a focus on things "as they are" (Stevens 1937). This is a phenomenological endeavor more than a Kantian attempt to grasp the thing before the perceiving subject: to see things not as necessarily symbolically loaded, but as they appear to individuals in experience.

In prose fiction, Virginia Woolf's character, visual artist Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) voices a similar desire: to get hold of "the thing itself before it has been made anything" (Woolf 1927, 163). Formal experiments in the depiction of consciousness and experience also lead to special attention to the material world and its particular things, sometimes amounting to their animation or personification: a lemon-scented soap travelling in Leopold Bloom's pocket keeps reminding him of its very material existence throughout the day as depicted in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), and finally, fantastically, begins to speak (see Majumdar 2006); in a section of *To the Lighthouse*, the passage of time is represented, as it were, from the point of view of the furnishings of an empty summer house (see Nishimura 2015). Thus, as David Herman among others has pointed out, beside the alleged inward turn of modernism, there is a turn toward the lived world to investigate the material reality as it is experienced (see Herman 2011a; Nykänen 2015, 2). Why, then, when so many other writers have also reflected these concerns, does this study focus specifically on Jean Rhys and Djuna Barnes?

Firstly, these singular texts are what gave rise to the questions that initially motivated the study. Their fiction highlights the presence of material things in multiple ways, some of which are shared, while others are unique to the particular text. Barnes's interiors are filled with curious *bric-à-brac*, which at times seems to overrun the human characters, and the characters are conversely presented as thing-like; her narration favors a multisensory experience of the material world, bringing forth its things and textures as not only seen, but also touched, heard, smelled, and tasted. Rhys's humans also sometimes resemble things in how they are perceived by others in the fictional world, and some of her characters seem more capable of sympathizing with a thing than with a person. They frequent public rather than private places; they live in hotels and spend time in cafés, dream of new, transformative dresses or just shoes with no holes in them, and sometimes experience fleeting moments of happiness and belonging that are mediated by such things. Degrees of dehumanization of characters, a focus on multisensory experience, and the use of material things in depicting feelings, dreams and desires are characteristics present in other modernist writers' texts, and in Anglophone short fiction. Barnes and Rhys share many features with the work of Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf and James

Joyce, but by pointing to the singular qualities of Barnes's and Rhys's writing and investigating them in the modernist context, this study will broaden the conception of modernist fiction. A narrow corpus enables an in-depth discussion of textual features in the stories, but these discussions also prove enlightening in relation to the study of both modernism and materialities in literary fiction.

Rhys and Barnes are an intriguing pair; both are nowadays critically recognized and widely researched writers, although their work remains surprisingly little known outside academia. Both led cosmopolitan lives, with geographical overlaps. Djuna Barnes was born in upstate New York, and she had an early career as a student and writer in New York City, where she returned in the 1940s, after living in Europe, to stay until her death. Jean Rhys, on the other hand, had her origins in the British West Indies. She studied theatre and worked as an actress in Great Britain; furthermore, she lived and wrote in several European cities before returning to Southwestern England, where she spent the final decades of her life. Both writers lived and worked in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s, which was the heyday of the modernist expatriate community. However, they were both closer to the margins than the center of this community. Barnes was recognized as a writer, but chiefly by a small number of dedicated followers, and she moved mostly in the lesbian circles around writer and philanthropist Natalie Barney; her work never achieved wide publicity, but rather gained a cult following. Rhys remained even more unknown; her Paris years were colored by financial and health problems. As late as 1966, her stories and novels had received no wider acclaim before the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Barnes and Rhys share a temporal and geographical context interesting from the point of view of both modernism and material things, to which they were both outsiders; however, they did not apparently interact with one another, as they belonged to separate cultural microcosms.

Barnes's varied *oeuvre* consists of early pieces of journalism and stories she wrote when she was living in New York and already a well-known figure in the bohemian center of Greenwich Village; she also wrote poetry, plays, and two novels: *Ryder* (1928), and her best known work, *Nightwood* (1936). Her work was mostly composed and published during the three first decades of the 20th century. The majority of her short stories were first published in magazines; later, some of them were compiled and revised into *A Book* (1923) and *A Night among the Horses* (1929) before the posthumous publication of her *Collected Stories* (1997). She often returned to work on the same stories, not only producing new versions but also recycling themes and motifs across texts.

Across the pond, Jean Rhys's first publication was a collection of short fiction *The Left Bank and Other Stories* in 1927. In the following years between the two wars, she wrote four novels, to be followed by a silence of almost thirty years before her late breakthrough into wider popular and critical acclaim with the novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). During her later years, two collections of short stories were

also published: *Tigers Are Better-Looking* in 1968 and *Sleep It off Lady* in 1976, which was her final publication except for the posthumously published, unfinished autobiography, *Smile Please* (1979).

The focus of this study will be on short fiction that both writers composed during the first decades of the 20th century, while other stories and fiction is also mentioned. The term 'short fiction' is used here to do justice to the plurality of texts included among the shorter prose written by the two authors. While Barnes mostly wrote what can conveniently be called 'stories', some of the texts in Rhys's *Left Bank* are very short, impressionistic sketches or vignettes depicting a situation; in fact, 'story' with its implication of a progression of events is not the best term to describe them although it is included in the collection's title.[2] In the course of this study, most texts will be referred to as '(short) stories', but the umbrella term better suited to refer to the totality of the corpus is 'short fiction'.

Why the focus on short fiction in the first place? Firstly, these texts have been studied far less than longer prose work by both writers, which has become a rather popular topic of research and teaching. The short fiction has many thematic and stylistic qualities in common with the other writings by both authors, but even though many of the short stories and sketches predate the longer prose, they cannot be regarded as mere early finger exercises in contrast to more serious writing. Instead, they deserve to be studied as independent singular entities, tightly interwoven in the work of their writers but presenting unique means of expression because of their formal qualities. modernist short stories themselves are often described as intricate items of artifice made by the skilled hands of the writer. Lorna Sage, in her introduction to Katherine Mansfield's *The Garden Party and Other Stories*, calls them "intensely crafted and evocative objects-on-the-page" (Sage 1997, vii). Secondly, these very qualities make short fiction a case of special interest when looking at material things. It can be presumed that the short form invites special attention on the part of the reader to all material detail that is presented, with less general description of settings, for instance. Some stories can be characterized as "spatial" or "anecdotal," focusing on the descriptive rendering of a situation rather than a temporal progression (Harrington 2007, 5). Ellen Burton Harrington (2007, 1), calls short fiction an "outlaw" form especially fit for experimentation, and points out its importance for women writers, while Clare Hanson (1985, 89) sees feminist potential

2 Curiously, though, there is no one story called "The Left Bank" in the collection. One possible reading of the title is that it parallelizes "story" and place: the stories and sketches set on the Left Bank, the then-bohemian area in Paris south of the river Seine, make up a totality that could be the "story called the Left Bank," while others set in the South of France, around Europe and in the Caribbean islands would make up the "other stories" of other places.

in the nonlinearity of many modern short stories. For the modernist short story, the focus is often on a singular *experience,* a "moment of being"[3] and a visual effect, at the expense of a well-constructed plot (Hanson 1985, 5–6, 55; Harrington 2007, 4). This is a fitting description especially of Rhys's fiction, while Barnes seems to alternate between celebrating, parodying, and distancing herself from the tradition of well-plotted stories.

Specific things in stories can also have importance as *leitmotifs,* devices used to maintain the cohesion of the text and assist in a critical moment which may lead to an "epiphany," a moment of revelation identified as typical of short stories (Harrington 2007, 6). Barnes's and Rhys's short fiction does not always provide such moments, and neither does the majority of modern short fiction, which is often characterized by ambiguity and openness instead of cohesion and a single moment of enlightenment of meaning, that were the ideal characteristics of short fiction as famously suggested by Edgar Allan Poe's "single effect" doctrine (Poe 1984, 571; Head 1992, 2; Harrington 2007, 5). What is typical for the short texts studied here is the focus on specific moments conveying not only "intense and significant experience" (Hanson 1985, 55), but also an aesthetic vision and a descriptive attitude that draws attention to the material world.

The following chapters will show the multiple ways in which things are used to convey such moments of experience and to construct aesthetic effect within multiple kinds of stories and sketches. Thereby, this study will also provide insight on the means of expression of modernist short fiction, still a relatively under-researched topic. In previous research on things and materialities in modernist fiction, the thematic fields of commodity fetishism and psychoanalysis have generally been dominant. More recently, studies taking an interest in the agency of things as well as their felt materiality in fiction, including modernist texts, have emerged (see for instance, Bernaerts et al. 2014; Majumdar 2006; Nishimura 2015). Earlier studies of Barnes and Rhys have taken the material world into account in different ways; many of them find parallels between modernist fiction and different modern phenomena from consumer culture to colonialism. Studies have shown that Rhys's characters negotiate their identities and basic survival in the urban consumer jungle, and that her work is linked to contemporary fashion (Joannou 2012, Oliver 2016), politics of space and movement (Parsons 2000, Thacker 2009, Johnson 2015), and the culture of exhibitions (Britzolakis 2007). In the recent collection, *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First-Century Approaches* edited by Erica L. Johnson and Patricia Moran, several articles take a materialist, ecocritical or posthumanist perspective on specific questions related especially to Rhys's use of postcolonial settings and motifs (Emery 2015; Savory 2015; Johnson 2015).



3 Following the title of Virginia Woolf's posthumously published collection of autobiographical writing (1985).

Several researchers have explored Barnes's relationship to commodities and fashion (Goody 1999; Warburton 2007; Oliver 2014), as well as the relationship of her work to the politics of space (Wilson 2011), and to nonhuman animals (Rohman 2009, 2007), all of which are of interest in this study. Julie Taylor's (2012) monograph on affectivity in Barnes's work provides an important background for my study, although it does not specifically focus on things, materialities or experientiality. Other studies are referred to because of their focus on short fiction by either Rhys or Barnes (Allen 1991; Parsons 2003; Plumb 1986; Savory 2009). Importantly, all these studies, like the research on Barnes's and Rhys's texts in general, is oriented more toward cultural questions than narrative structures, means and devices, or a theoretical interest in the readerly position. While I draw on their substantial insights into the cultural dynamics, values, and influence of the texts, I aim to devote some more attention to the narrative, and specifically experiential means by which such dynamics, values and effects are produced and conveyed to their readers. Thus, the study will to discuss how the cultural work that the texts undoubtedly achieve as textual agents in the world is made into a felt, "lived" reader experience, and how this affects the culturally sensitive interpretations. To pursue this aim, I draw on a variety of theoretical approaches, to give adequate conceptual support to the themes of each chapter and section. The main theoretical threads running throughout the study, however, are new materialist thinking on things and materialities, and embodied cognitive approaches on reading.

## 1.2 Things, Objects, and Materialities

"Things" might be the topic of the broadest study imaginable, as the word can refer to almost any*thing* one is unable or unwilling to name more precisely although it rarely denotes a person.[4] However, this research is not about *anything*, but relies on a more specific meaning of 'things', suggested by the addition of "materialities" in the title. The things in the scenes referred to at the very beginning of this introduction all share certain qualities: they are material, inanimate items that can be used by human beings, even if they were not specifically used by a character in all these fictional moments. Their materiality is something readers can be assumed to be familiar with experientially. We carry clothes about our person, and they can be so close that we may not always experience them as "things," but rather as extensions of our lived bodies; we attach certain meanings to a block of white marble based on the contexts where we have seen such things used; we have learned to hold books and look at paintings in a specific way. All these things also have more or less recognizable borders, according to which readers engaging with these imaginary things will separate them from the environment, as they have learned to do with the things encountered in everyday life. These things are also recognizable as commodities, objects endowed with economic value and intended for exchange, although in the texts they are not reducible to this role (cf. Appadurai 1986, 3).

The Oxford English Dictionary adequately gives 'thing' a wide variety of definitions, out of which the following are most relevant for the study at hand: "[a] material object, an article, an item; a being or entity consisting of matter, or occupying space," "an inanimate object," or "[a]n actual being or entity as distinguished from a word, symbol, or idea by which it is symbolized or represented; that which is signified." Already within these definitions, there is a range of meanings from the very general, "something as opposed to nothing" to the particular and concrete (see Brown 2016, 17). My choice to discuss primarily 'things', not, for instance, 'objects', reflects the way this study aims to highlight both the very materiality and the potential agency of things. Both words have a wide semantic field, but they nonetheless point toward different directions of thought. 'Object', like 'thing', can denote not only inanimate material items, but also



4 Rather, the two usually form a binary opposition (Brown 2016, 9).

anything "placed before or presented to the eyes or other senses" or, considered as a grammatical category, "a person or thing to which something is done" (OED). Thereby the presence of an object also implies the presence of a subject, a seer to whom the object presents itself or a doer whose actions are directed at the object. It is the aim of this study to repeatedly question the binary opposition of subject/object, because it does not adequately describe the complex relations of people and things in the stories discussed. The material things in the texts may be objects of sentences, which imply a grammatical subject, but these linguistic relations do not completely define what the things *do* in the fictional world, and what they do to the readers of the fiction. Therefore, the use of 'object' is reserved for specific cases where this kind of dichotomy needs to be discussed, and often challenged. Things, on the other hand, exist and occupy space with their materiality, regardless of who is looking at them or doing something to them, and regardless of the meanings that encircle them.

In addition, other materialities that do not so easily fit under the definition of a thing with clear borders separating them from the environment, are also present in the stories, like the undergrowth through which the man in a top hat is crawling, or other environments that we are invited to imagine, however vaguely, to make up the spaces of the rented room or the luxurious bedchambers, although we have the capacity, and perhaps the tendency, to see the world as composed of things. The bodies of the fictional characters are among the material existents in the stories, and as the analyses will show, the borderline between a human and a thing-body is not always clear-cut.

First, there are some problems inherent in discussing such "material" entities in literature, where they, after all, are fictional, indicated by words and imagined by the reader, and only occupy space in the form of the medium in which they are read. However, as I will briefly suggest, the way in which we encounter material things in fictional stories draws on our experiences of the actual material world. The focus of interest here is very much on this level of experienced materiality, not much in what lies *behind* the things referred to by words, as in their symbolic meanings or ideological implications. These meanings are not ignored, but this study suggests that a shift of focus is needed to be able to discern what the stories' evocations of material things in their imagined "thingness" do to the reading and interpretation of the stories.

"Thing theory," an approach that promotes the importance of the very "thingness" of things, has influenced the basic framing of this study. The initiator of this approach, Bill Brown, suggests that researchers pay attention to things and our relations to them as they appear in art and literature (Brown 2003, 2004, 2016). One point of

departure for Brown's thinking is in Martin Heidegger's writings about the thing (*das Ding*) as a part of the lifeworld, whose being always remains unattainable for humans when they approach their world by way of objects and tools, yet is somehow graspable in moments when an object refuses to work (a broken tool, a dirty window) (Heidegger 1984, 73; Brown 2016, 28).[5] Brown also draws on the "actor–network theory," sociologist Bruno Latour's seminal attempt to recognize the diversity of agencies (or "actants," a term borrowed from structuralist literary studies; see Greimas 1987) taking part in societies, including nonhuman ones (Latour 2005). Brown strives to step beyond a general tendency to view the literary world of things as a passive background to events, and to allow for more space for things in their different roles and relationships, from collectors' prized possessions in Henry James's fiction to the vividness of a metal object telling a story in Homer's ekphrastic description of Achilles' shield (Brown 2003, 162–175; 2016, 1–15). His thinking rests on the recognition that literature can provide a sensitive account of the relationships between people and things that often go unnoticed in our everyday lives.[6] It has led literary scholars to discuss, for instance, the narrative and political impact of 18th century stories narrated by things such as clothes, coins and coaches (Lamb 2011), and the recalcitrance and obsolescence of things in American fiction (Tischleder 2014).

This study shares thing theory's sense of distinction between objects and things and the general project of paying attention to the world of things, yet this is not a sufficient background support for studying the way humans and things are intermingled in terms of agency, affectivity and meaning in Barnes's and Rhys's writing. The notion of 'thing' is useful for this study because it reflects the human tendency to see the world as divided into individual things, as opposed to the crude physical level of general materiality. The inclusion of "materialities," as well as the definition of things as "lived" in the study title points to a slightly different direction: instead of only looking for the essence of things or thingness *an sich* as disclosed by the fictional work, the aim is to grasp more flexible and fluid relationships, in which the common denominator of materiality encompasses people, things and environments alike. Instead of emphasizing the *otherness* of things, or their withdrawal into themselves (cf. Harman 2002, 4), the literary texts at the heart of this research point toward a need to study how a human being-in-the-world is entangled in and defined by the presence of materiality and things. The plural form of materialities introduces a further complexity, suggesting that there

5 Heidegger's thinking about "the thing" is much more complex than this, and develops throughout his writings, as Brown himself demonstrates (2016, 24–32). However, the tension between things as unattainable and obstinate or resisting, and the human attempt to understand something of their ways of being, is crucial for Brown's use of the concept of 'thing'.

6 However, Brown (2016, 7) also warns against putting too much weight on the value of reading literature as an experience that "teaches" us about things, as reading experiences vary greatly.

are materialities different in kind and effect. These will be approached with the help of "new materialist" thinking, which will also provide ways to challenge the initial tendency toward anthropocentrism implied by the phenomenological interest in experience that this study takes.

New materialisms have emerged as part of a "material turn" in the humanities, a reaction to directions in postmodern thought resting on the primacy of language and social forms in constructing meanings, identities and even bodies. While exposing the multiple ways in which the world we think of as "real" is constructed by language and culture, such thinking leaves little room for understanding the materiality of either human beings or the world (see Boscagli 2014, 1–2). This is also where the "new" materialisms differ from "old" materialism, whose origins can be attributed to Marx and which implies a focus on modes of production and economic systems, keeping the human at its center and the subject/object divide more or less intact, while new materialists work to challenge it. From this perspective, however, language and culture should not be disregarded completely. Rather, the attention to nonhuman materialities, and the material makings of the human, can complement the study of culture, language, and human experience, and vice versa; new materialist thinking builds on the insight that "our material lives are always culturally mediated, but they are not only cultural" (Coole & Frost 2010, 27). Nor is it necessary to turn toward biological determinism when it comes to human bodies and gender, for instance. The "material" of new materialism is not a lifeless lump of unattainable reality on which meanings are inscribed by linguistic and cultural practices: matter and bodies, too, produce meanings and actions (Coole & Frost 2010, 6; Bennett 2010, 1–4).

New materialist approaches are helpful for thinking about things and materialities in this study because of the way they challenge the divide into human subjects and the "objective," inanimate material world that haunts the tradition of humanist studies. Much thinking rests on this divide, but it remains inadequate when trying to grasp the human–thing relations in Rhys's and Barnes's work. An alternative way of thinking means reaching beyond the "life–matter binary" in which matter is seen as a stable and fixed entity, and materialities are recognized as having power, vitality, or "vibrancy" of their own (cf. Coole & Frost 2010, 7; Bennett 2010). New materialisms tend to be more radical in visions of distributed agency than thing theory, even though Brown's more recent writings have also moved toward recognizing the potential "vitality" things have beyond their potential for stagnant recalcitrance (Brown 2016, 2–6). Material things may resist our actions when they cease to work for us as tools and objects of doing, or as symbolic entities to guide the interpretation of a story.

However, things also take active part in human lives, from the ways our bodies interact with and are permeated by chemical matter of the "environment" to the way appliances, means of transportation, and furniture direct our movements, postures and relationships.

Phenomenological and cognitively oriented studies also note the "distributed" nature of thinking and other cognitive activities, which is why they do not always appear that distant from new materialisms: the clay is a mode of thinking for the potter (Malafouris 2008), and material things are incorporated in the human lived body and affective experience (Colombetti 2016). Furthermore, following the seminal "ecological psychology" of James J. Gibson, the environment offers affordances that invite certain kinds of action on the part of the organism living in it: according to Gibson, "[...] we were created by the world we live in" (1979, 130). As will become clear during this study, such phenomenologically oriented studies of cognition as Gibson's are not far from new materialisms, yet the phenomenological approaches applied in this study benefit from the addition of explicit discussion of the dynamics between the material and the cultural that new materialisms offer.

Fictional things need not be personified or magically animated to appear as lively and active, and to have an effect on us. Their seemingly mute and unattainable being is already permeated by life and agency of its own kind, which we often simply fail to notice or lack the words to describe. To find such words, this study looks at cultural meanings and materialities as intertwined. One central new materialist interest in the study is the view of agency as distributed between human and material things, in the fictional world as well as in reading and interpretation. In this vein, I follow the work of Jane Bennett (2010) and Karen Barad (2007), both of whom have argued, through slightly different routes, that agency emerges when things and bodies come together: humans and nonhuman entities become agents only by way of each other. There is no bicycle rider without a bicycle and a ground on which it can be ridden; these are features we add, in our interpretive imagination, to even fictional evocations of the event of bicycling. Equally, there is no reader without the nonhuman agencies of the text and the book, other environmental contributors of the event of reading, or the influence of its cultural and linguistic context.

Another linked concern is the affective potential of things and materialities that is also linked to things' potential for agency. In the Spinozist-Deleuzean account of affectivity that has also been influential to new materialist studies, affectivity is conceptualized as something occurring *in between* bodies—human and nonhuman (Seigworth & Gregg 2010, 2). In the fictional worlds of the texts discussed, emotions, feelings and moods are all created in encounters involving not only human characters, but also nonhuman agents. For the narrative evocation of a feeling, a mood or an ambience, it is not insignificant that the stories referred to at the beginning of this introduction show their characters holding a dress or crawling through a thicket. In concrete terms, the affectivity that can be ascribed to

materialities relies on the senses, perhaps especially the sense of touch. Physically *feeling* the surfaces of things is used to evoke other forms of feeling and emotion that are not entirely attributable to the senses. The focus on things as sensed materials shows how they necessarily take on other meanings besides their potential symbolic associations and commodity values: the power of things to affect us is one facet of their potential agency (see Boscagli 2014, 4). The affectivity of things is thus present in all the following analyses, even though only Chapter 4 is dedicated to feelings, emotions and moods.

All the following discussions deal with encounters between people and things, human and nonhuman agents and bodies, in which the sensed materiality always plays a role, and in which both the human and thing act and are acted upon, affect and become affected. The event of reading, too, is here conceived of as such an encounter. Importantly, the new materialist approach needs to be combined with an analysis of literary devices, and not remain on a merely thematic level of pointing out things, but showing *how* it is that materialities are evoked in fiction, and how they participate in the experience of reading; such notions have been marginal in new materialist studies so far, with the exception of Marlene Karlsson Marcussen's important study (2016).[7] Here, to analyze encounters that occur between reading minds and bodies, the fictional bodies of characters and things, and the body of the book, new materialist approaches are complemented with cognitive literary studies' insights into reading as an embodied activity.

7 Further on the problems of recent literary applications of new materialisms, see Marcussen 2016, 18.

## 1.3 Reading and Experience

When focusing attention on lived experience in relation to literary fiction, we need to ask how fictional works manage to convey a sense of livedness; in the field of narratology this is known by the term 'experientiality', which was introduced by Monika Fludernik (1996). According to Fludernik's take on "natural narratology," all narratives imply a human experiencer, if not in their explicit content, then in the way they are received in the process of reading. Experientiality can be defined by the ability of a work of fiction to convey experiences in a dynamic where readers' real-life experiences of engagement with the real world meet evocations of fictional experience in a fictional world (Fludernik 1996, 30, 35; Caracciolo 2014a). Thus stories, when they function experientially, are capable of giving their reader not only a sense of "what happened," but "what it was like."[8] The features of a narrative that contribute to experientiality are not limited to the representation of characters as experiencing beings, but can involve description without a character focalizer, or devices such as rhythm and temporality, which may evoke lived experience (Caracciolo 2014b, 73–82). The "material" things we encounter in literary fiction are made of words, readable with the assistance of the materialities of ink and paper, or an electric reading device. However, these words can evoke the sense of various materialities in the fictional world. Fictional, nonhuman things, even when they display signs of independent agency and unruliness, always come to readers by way of an evocation of human experience, at least in the form of the reader's real-world memories of interacting with things, in light of which the fictional content is felt and understood.

What happens to readers, when they encounter one of Rhys's scenes of affective encounters between a dress and a character, or one of Barnes's rooms full of peculiar things? Readers and readings are different, of course, which is why no one answers this question can be given; yet it is not a case of complete subjectivism either. The focus here is on the text and the positions it invites its reader to take. This study does not gather empirical data of "real" readers' actual experiences when reading the texts, except for my first-person experience as a reader. This is not sufficient in itself to base a reading on, but



8 This qualitative, felt dimension that some take to be a fitting definition of narrative itself (Herman 2009; Caracciolo 2014a).

neither can it be avoided: some of my observations are unavoidably directed by my own reading experience and intuition; this is what ignites the initial questions, while their further discussion requires a comparison with other points of view. However, the analyses are supported by theoretical discussions of reading that are based on empirical evidence in cognitive psychology and linguistics, as well as narratological models of what occurs in the act of reading.

Recent cognitively oriented literary studies have called attention to the reader of narrative fiction as an embodied being. Drawing on the embodied and enactive paradigm in cognitive sciences and philosophy of mind, researchers such as Karin Kukkonen, Marco Caracciolo and Yanna Popova suggest that the cognitive activities involved in reading are dependent on the kind of body we have and how it can interact with the world. This is backed by a range of approaches in phenomenology, cognitive sciences, and philosophy of mind; there is not one unified approach, but rather an umbrella for different ones nevertheless sharing a focus on embodiment and interaction with the world as constitutive of cognition. These involve the theses of consciousness as essentially embodied (Johnson 1987) and of the mind *and* the world as enacted, that is, co-created in the interaction between an organism and its surroundings (Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991), as well as influential explorations of the phenomenological implications of such mind (Gallagher & Zahavi 2012), and of the cognitive functions as *extended* into external instruments (Clark & Chalmers 1998).

It is important to note that all these approaches have some of their roots in 20th century phenomenology, especially in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's introduction of the lived body at the center of phenomenological investigation, and verbalization of the intricacies of livedness between the body and the world, which again challenge the Cartesian dualism of the subjective and the objective: "The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making [...] Truth does not 'inhabit' only the 'inner man', or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, xii). The masculine in the quotation reflects the universalizing tendency of Merleau-Ponty's thinking. For instance, Sara Ahmed (2006) has pointed out that there is no universal, shared bodily experience, and the ways the world offers itself are not the same for everyone but influenced by factors such as gender, sexuality, and ethnicity.

In literary studies, enactive and embodied approaches allow us to see a continuity in the way meaning is made from the simplest cognitive engagement with the world to more complex activities such as reading, and base this view on empirical cognitive studies in

contrast to reader-response criticism, for instance (Popova 2016; 2015, 80). Our being-in-the-world is defined by a continuing process of sense-making, in which the world appears in a certain way, involving certain affordances, which are significant to us (Gibson 1979) and therefore always also evaluated, that is, affectively colored (Colombetti 2013). This kind of interaction and evaluation is necessarily also involved in our engagement with fictional texts and worlds.[9] An embodied model reader is less fixed by the alleged properties of the text than Wolfgang Iser's "implied reader" (1978), but does not lend itself to complete reader-centered relativism either, as the processes of sense-making are always grounded in the very material makings of both the text and the reader (cf. Eco 1992). According to Karin Kukkonen (2014), the focus on the embodiment of the reader adds to the "implied reader" by accounting for the ways making sense of fiction relies on how the body functions in the material world: how it uses predictive processing and the affordances of the world in sensorimotor actions.

As suggested by cognitive research, readers respond to stories by embodied enactments induced by so-called mirror neurons (Kukkonen & Caracciolo 2014, 264–265; cf. Gallese 2009), or, to provide a more nuanced explanation, by way of our "experiential traces" (unconscious) memories of past embodied activity and experience that the textual design of a piece of fiction activates (Zwaan 2008). Marco Caracciolo (2014b, 55–71) suggests that narratives tap into a reader's "experiential background," and readers engage with narratives by re-enacting these past experiences, involving basic sensorimotor perception as well as more complex results of sociocultural interaction. We recall what it is like to wear clothes or to feel the surface of marble, leather or wood with our hands, and the text's suggestion of a character's encounter with material things invites us to re-enact these memories imaginatively, while enacting the new experience produced by our engagement with the story. We know, on a preconscious level, what it is like to catch a ball or grasp a door handle, and the presentation of such things in a story invites a cognitive enactment of the sensorimotor actions invited by the thing, even if our reading body remains still (Ibid.; Gibbs 2017; Caracciolo 2016, 143; Zwaan & Taylor 2006). Instead of our minds being somehow disembodied and transported to storyworlds, our remaining embodied being enables our being immersed in and affected by stories.

Importantly, this does not mean that the readings would be reducible to, or must remain on, the level of basic embodied responses. Researchers suggest an interaction between bodily experience and cultural practices, where both affect one another and can help make sense of a work of fiction, while the work of fiction may also feed back into both the simply embodied and more sociocultural mediated

9 In what Yanna Popova (2015, 3) calls "participatory sense-making," readers enact fictional worlds, events and existents in communication with the text, like they continuously enact their being in the real world and their understanding of this world.

parts of the experiential background (Kukkonen & Caracciolo 2014, 267; Caracciolo 2014b, 49–50). In the following analyses of Barnes's and Rhys's stories, the cultural meanings attached to things are seen as colored by the affective, bodily responses to things as material, experienced bodies-in-space, yet these experiences, too, are shaped partly by our embeddedness in sociocultural practices. Furthermore, as Merja Polvinen (2017, 143) points out, embodied and enactive engagement with fiction does not mean that our narrative experiences would be exactly like "natural" ones, or that we would unwittingly lose ourselves in the story. What is enacted are not only characters' experiences or experiences suggested by the introduction of a thing, for instance, but also the linguistic and communicative features of the work, which make up the special characteristics of experiences induced by fiction (Ibid.). We may simultaneously go through paths of embodied affectivity, led by the textual design of a story, and be detached enough to understand this to be an experience of engaging with a work of fiction, and therefore able to use also other faculties of interpretation. These interactions and tensions between levels of experience and interpretation (the embodied and the cultural, the immersed and the detached) need to be taken into account when studying the ways fictional things contribute to experiential understandings of stories.

Conceptualized thus, the experientiality of fiction is not a property of the text per se, nor is it completely dependent on the subjective experiences of an individual reader, but rather a sense of livedness that emerges between these two, requiring the material, formal constraints and affordances provided by the text (its language and the material form in which it is read, as well as the references to material entities in the fictional world), and the actual experience of the reader (see also, Levine 2015, Cave 2016). Therefore, new materialist views on agency, affectivity, and embodied approaches into the experientiality of fiction resemble one another in foregrounding the way life and meaning are not "interior" properties, but something constantly created between bodies in the world. In fact, both avenues are useful to discuss the central questions of this study, namely how fictional accounts of material things transfer into readerly experience, affective engagement and interpretation of the stories' meaning, values and ideologies, and how important a part material things actually play in the reading of these particular texts.

## 1.4 From Lived Space and Time to Agency, Affect, and Meaning

For the first step in analyzing lived things in relation to bodily responses and cultural values, the second chapter of this study focuses on the ways material things are used to construct narrative *space* and *time*: what kind of things are included in descriptions of fictional spaces, and how do they contribute to the evocation of the fictional space as lived and sensed; how are they used in referring to specific *places,* or a specific moment of history; how is the lived experience of time conveyed with the help of material things? This chapter serves as a practical introduction to the approach to narrative experientiality applied in this study. Experiences of time as a pursuer passing by or catching up on one, as a material substance that can "run out," or as different levels of experience existing simultaneously, are built on bodily metaphors based on our interaction with the material world, on the culturally coded meanings suggested by the context of the stories, and on the conventions of the literary form. Time is seen and felt in the decay of things and heard in a ticking clock, while these material anchors also resonate with culturally shared understandings of war and depression, the gendered ideas related to ageing, and with the readers' familiarity with narrative plot and suspense.

Similarly, the chapter examines the co-construction of cultural and embodied meanings of space in the stories; this coincides with the discussion of time, since the two are deeply intermingled. Both Barnes and Rhys present domestic space as profoundly ambiguous and even hostile, while showing a preference for liminal and public spaces that allow the free movement of their characters. The chapter reviews how these sociocultural meanings, which have been pointed out by several researchers, are built on the experience of lived space and things, created in the particular textual space of the short story. The refocusing of attention on lived experience and materiality reveals original nuances of sociocultural significance: the defining ambiguity of domestic space and its implications for the construction of subjectivity, the interminglednes of the experiences of time and space, the potential of stories to evoke experiences of liminal spaces, heterotopias and nonlinear temporality.

The third chapter focuses on questions of agency. It, too, departs from concerns expressed by earlier research, considering first the ways of granting (fictional) things agency which have been in the focus of multiple studies on modernist art and literature, namely

different forms animism and fetishism. Magical thinking and animist religious practices, as well as Marxist, psychoanalytical and anthropological accounts of the fetish were present in the thought climate especially in the 1920s and 1930s, and echoes of them can be heard in the writing of Barnes and Rhys. Discussions related to these historical and cultural tendencies are again combined with a focus on the materiality and experientiality of fetishizing and animating things. How does a fetish object appeal to the senses and how does this sensed materiality affect the way it can be "used" to serve its purpose? Both Rhys and Barnes seem to turn toward a *talismanic* version of fetishism, as their characters use things to enhance their potential for acting in the world; they do not, as Freud and Marx perhaps would have it, do so to fill a void or disguise a lack. How is this interpretation of fetishism encouraged by references to the lived materiality of things? This question leads to a broadening of the idea of agency in general, and the recognition that action in many of the stories is arranged around combinations of characters and things. Things define the brief moments of belonging, which my reading suggests are crucial for Jean Rhys's fiction: not only do people collect and desire things, but things also bring people together; they can even serve as meaningful companions. In Djuna Barnes's stories, events subside to descriptions of *assemblages* of people and things, in which all parties affect and are affected by one another. The analysis shows, that a new materialist conception of distributed agency can shed light on the thing-like people and lively things populating these compositions.

Affectivity is an important part of the discussion of distributed agency already, but it is taken up as the main interest in Chapter 4. Emotions as culturally understood phenomena are brought together with vaguer, embodied forms of affect and mood induced by the sensed materiality of things. Clothes have a particular significance here, as they are frequently used by both writers as effective means of expressing affective states, especially in the short fiction, perhaps because of their ready proximity to the body; the significant gesture of a mother pulling on a glove, and another carrying her child in equally gloved hands are examples in two of Barnes's stories; the way a cabinet full of unworn dresses induces empathy in one of Rhys's characters, and the feeling of happiness another character experiences when wearing beautiful clothes of her own also reflect the author's preoccupation with clothing as affective things. A focus on things and materialities leads to an added affirmative emphasis on "positive" feelings of belonging, pleasure, happiness, and empathy, which are sometimes overlooked in the analyses of Barnes's and Rhys's work.

The fifth and final chapter focuses on the domain of meaning, once again suggesting the ways culturally-coded, symbolic, metaphorical and metonymical meanings interact with more basic forms of embodied sense-making. The first part of the chapter discusses the ways in which Rhys's stories repeatedly refer to masses of things as well as people and take a "decorative" stance toward both. These strategies are investigated as simultaneously inviting embodied sense-making, aesthetic experience and consideration, and ethical conclusions. The second part focuses on Barnes's ways of mixing metonymical and symbolic meanings with invitations to embodied sense-making by way of things and materialities. This chapter also raises the question of interpretation, referring to a recent tension between ways of reading that look for hidden symbols or ideologies, and alternative forms that focus on the surface of the text or its affirmative, affective potential. The point of view taken in this study acknowledges the importance of surfaces, especially the felt surfaces of things, and the authors' use of things and materialities as well as embodiment not only as resisting or restricting, but also as potentially creating and liberating. This focus produces readings that are on the "reparative" or affirmative side, compared to some earlier research, while also acknowledging the complexity and ambiguity of meaning suggested by the texts. Consequently, the ways of reading "lived things" presented in this study may change conceptions of the singular texts by Rhys and Barnes and the phenomenon of modernist short fiction, while the texts do their part to add to an understanding of narrative experientiality and the ways in which life in the real world is shared with material things.

# Things, Space, and Time: Bodily Experiences and Cultural Interpretations

# 2 Things, Space, and Time: Bodily Experiences and Cultural Interpretations

We live in spacious times.

— Ford Madox Ford, *The Soul of London*[10]

Time and space are my enemies.

— Djuna Barnes, "Madame Grows Older: A Journal at the Dangerous Age"[11]

Ford Madox Ford's characterization of the beginning of the 20th century as "spacious times" can be read as an optimistic reflection on the spaciousness of the world enabling more movement than before (see Ford 1995). Modernity and modernism did indeed mean changes in the ways of experiencing both time and space, and in their artistic processing (Thacker 2009, 1–2; Jameson 1991). Many descriptions suggest that the division into private and public space became less clear-cut than before, and new forms of public or semi-public space, available for a greater number of people—even women—emerged in urban cafés, hotels and department stores. Lived time is often hard to distinguish from lived space, and new means of conquering space affected the experience of time, too, as Andrew Thacker suggests: "Modern time and space now *felt* different, because, for example, one could travel by train at hitherto unimagined speeds, converting vast stretches of space into mere blips on the clock" (Thacker 2009, 47).

A sense of spaciousness and movement also permeates Djuna Barnes's and Jean Rhys's fiction, yet they have an ambivalent relationship to both time and space. Some of the writers' short stories are set in spaces defined by heaviness and confinement, and in some, the sense of openness created by a particular space may attach itself not only to meanings of freedom and opportunity, but also to rootlessness and dizziness. Space can be "difficult to live in," as one of Barnes's characters describes her home in the short story "Cassation" (1925,[12] Barnes 1997=*CS*, 384). Time, often conceived in a basic metaphorical way either as a linear path or as a consumable substance, can appear

10 1905; Ford 1995, 41.

11 Under the pseudonym Lydia Steptoe, 1924; *Collected Stories,* 357.

12 Originally published as "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady," revised version with the new title published in *Spillway* (1962). *Collected Stories,* p. 357.

as hostile, as it does to Barnes's "Madame" above: "Time and space are my enemies" (*CS*, 357). Several studies have pointed out the preference both writers seem to have for liminal and threshold spaces, and the way a stable sense of belonging to a *place* is absent in their work (Emery 2015; Mulholland 2002; Wilson 2011; Zimmerman 2015). These studies show the notions of space and time as historically and culturally defined constructs. Rhys's and Barnes's spaces are observed from female, queer and postcolonial perspectives, which often result in tensions that may even conclude in conceptualizing the abstract yet felt entities of space and time as "enemies."

This chapter builds on these insights, but its aim is to shed light on the experientiality of space, meaning the "creation of 'story-driven' experiences in narrative audiences" (Caracciolo 2014a): the feeling induced in a reader of having gone through an experience with the narrative and its characters. Thus, the present chapter sets the embodied cognitive approach to experientiality in the context of modernist fiction and the cultural problematics readable in Rhys's and Barnes's fiction. It is useful for this study to discuss experientiality in cases of narration and description in which a human body is presented in relation to space and the thing-bodies populating that space, to provide an idea of the ways to approach lived human-thing relations in fiction. The experience of temporality tends to be part of such cases, and attention to the relationship between space and time also means attention to the relationship between things and time. Thereby, the historical and ideological context of the texts is brought together with lived experience, also following the feminist suggestion made by Iris Marion Young, for instance, of bringing "body experience" back to gender studies, in accordance with a new materialist recognition of materiality as productive of sociocultural phenomena (Young 2005, 12–26; Coole & Frost 2010, 6; Caracciolo 2014b, 158). How is the *feeling* of space and time, both of which seem to have changed in modernity, produced with the help of material things? How is the felt dimension of materiality related to culturally informed considerations of time, space, and experience as gendered phenomena?

A sense of space is sometimes seen as necessary for the imagining of the events and existents in a narrative (see Scarry 1999, 14; Brosch 2015, 99), and its importance has been emphasized lately, even though most definitions of narrative foreground time instead of space (Ryan 2014). As Renate Brosch (2015, 99) observes, "Space is central for every experience in real life," so much so that it affects language as well as the understanding of fiction. Stories are not only about the temporal rendering of events, but also about worlds and spaces in which these events occur; some short stories with a descriptive focus can appear as predominantly spatial (Harrington 2007, 5). In

description or in narration, the two often are difficult to distinguish (Fludernik & Keen 2014, 454–457).

Space can be observed through different strategies, such as the "map" and the "tour" (Linde & Labov 1975). A map-like description presents space panoramically, often a bird's eye view, while a tour-like account takes a limiter perspective that moves around to explore the fictional world. According to David Herman, large expanses of space can also be experienced in more dynamic ways as what he calls the "gaze tour," which would be a more accurate way of describing the experience by applying virtue of the natural, embodied means of perception available to readers (Herman 2002, 280–281). Some of the stories studied here use such strategies, but they are more likely to have what Herman calls the "body tour," using a fictional body to explore the space as if moving in it (Ibid.). The cognitive result of narrative presentation of space can be something akin to a map (Ryan 2003), but it can also be a vaguer set of images or sensations. Not all stories result in a comprehensive cognitive mapping of the fictional world (Schneider 2001). Rather, stories make use of the multisensory ways in which we experience space, not only providing visual tours and maps but also involving sounds, odors and especially tactile sensations (Warhol 2014, 612). Material things have key roles in phenomena such as the construction of "haptic space" based on the imagined sense of touch (Stanica 2014, 519), and individual material things may arise from the text as more experientially vivid than a map-like sense of space (Thacker 2009, 30).

Time is intermingled with space, especially in its experienced, lived sense. As the two influence one another in fiction, "time [...] thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible," and "space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history," as Mikhail Bakhtin (1990, 84) observes when introducing the concept of the *chronotope*. For Bakhtin, time is present in the "plot" or the narrative, and its relations to historical and biographical time (that pertaining to the life of an individual). Material things have their roles in references to extra fictional history and the life-span of an individual, as well as in the narrative means of emplotment and play with temporal sequentiality on the "discourse time" level of the story (see Genette 1980). A certain repertoire of things suggests a specific period of historical time: the material detail in Rhys's stories set during the Second World War differs slightly from those set in the 1920s, for instance.

Authors can experiment with connections of things and time by using, as Barnes did, antiquarian, decayed and vaguely timed objects accompanied by equally archaistic word choices. The decay of things is an index of personal experience of time passing. Time seems to be experienced as movement in space, either of oneself or of an invisible entity that "passes," "lingers," or "runs out." Such movements can be made visible by changes in the material world, or with the help of things such as clocks and calendars. There is no long-term character development or biographical focus in Rhys's and Barnes's stories;

rather, they focus on the experience of a moment, a "slice of life," or, in some of Barnes's "well-plotted" stories, a comedy of misunderstandings that occur in a narrow time-frame (Head 1992, 14, 16). The compressed narrative time of a short story leads to more emphasis on the paradigmatic combinations of elements than the syntagmatic, causal connections of a plot (Ibid., 7, 10–11, 22). Rhys's impressionistic sketches and Barnes's late stories might actually be seen as spatial rather than temporal forms as they have more description than narration in contrast to Fredric Jameson's (2003) suggestion that modernist fiction is predominantly temporal, while postmodernism moves toward spatiality (cf. Frank 1991).

Time and space also intersect with *place*. There is overlapping in the use of the terms 'space' and 'place'; here I reserve 'space' for general references to three-dimensional space as well as the *lived* space inhabited by a lived body, while 'place' is used to refer to more clearly defined, particular geographical locations (see de Certeau 1984; Thacker 2009, 1–9) although the distinction between the two is often arbitrary. Some recognizable places coincide in Barnes's and Rhys's work. Place is taken note of here, as far as it supports the more central notion of lived, experienced space, which can be affected by but is not reducible to its location on the map and the surface of the earth (cf. Thacker 2009, 30, Ryan 2003, 138). As Marlene Karlsson Marcussen observes, modernist texts especially by Virginia Woolf, demonstrate ways of describing space *as an event* that is active in itself, in spite of its being made of material things (Marcussen 2016, 153–156). In the following, the material things in the interior spaces of Rhys's and Barnes's fiction are shown to be equally vibrant with both agency and meaning.

The following analyses of short stories are organized around types of spaces, which are often but not always realized in places. Within these fictional spaces, the relationship among space, things, and time is discussed. A distinction is made between private and public space, another division central in Bahktin's discussion of the chronotope. It is clear from the outset that this dichotomy is not absolute in the stories discussed, yet the tensions it creates are often deeply significant. Firstly, I examine how Rhys and Barnes employ the space of the house, and domestic space in general, and how the preference for *liminality* that researchers have identified in their work is realized within the domain of experientiality with the help of material things. Secondly, the discussion moves to the public spaces of the modern city: through the quasi-domestic spaces of hotels, boarding houses, prisons, and hospitals, to cafés and streets, to shed light on the oscillation between stagnation and mobility, lightness and heaviness, that permeates both writers' work and becomes embodied and culturally

significant. Finally, the spatial metaphor of *containment* as a further way to complicate domesticity is inspected in relation to spaces even less domestic ranging from the shop and the museum, in Barnes's work, to the miniature spaces of suitcases, boxes and clothes which are central to Rhys's fiction. These three topics raise questions related to the use of material things as means of literary experientiality, producing the "feel" of space and time. This chapter discusses a wide range of short stories from both writers, thus providing an overview of their short prose work that the following chapters will continue to investigate with a narrower focus.

## 2.1 The House and the Other Space

> There is not so much as a draught between the frames of the windows, or a crack in the boards. And yet—if life should refuse to live there?
>
> — Virginia Woolf: "Modern Fiction"[13]

A successful work of "modern fiction," in Virginia Woolf's terms, allows for some "draught" and "cracks," meaning irregularities and ambiguities in story structure and ideology alike, if they lead to a true depiction of "life itself"; this is a new kind of realism, perhaps arguing against Henry James's famous analogy between the novel and a house in the preface of *The Portrait of a Lady* (James 1936; Woolf 1948, 186).[14] Researchers have characterized the textual space of a short story as inhabited by similar ambiguities, dissonances, unresolved events, and openness of interpretation (Brosch 2015, 98).[15]

Interior spaces in fiction are easily thought to equal domestic spaces (Stanica 2014, 513). Early phenomenological research ascribable to the "spatial turn" in the humanities also focused on Bachelardian and Heideggerian ideas of dwelling and home as the basis of spatial experience (Thacker 2009, 14). Feminist scholars, however, have pointed out the problems inherent in the insistence of house and the home as the spatial center for human being-in-the-world, and that the home is a deeply ambivalent place for women (Young 2005, 123). Furthermore, the intention of this study, motivated by the characteristics of Barnes's and Rhys's texts and the phenomenological and new materialist approaches taken to them, is to find ways of reading the texts beyond a Cartesian assumption of interior subjectivity versus exterior world of objects. If we accept there is no "inner (wo)man," in the sense of Merleau-Ponty's ideas mentioned earlier, do we also need to read fictional interiors differently?

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13 1921; Woolf 1948, 186.

14 The explicit targets of Woolf's critique are Edwardian popular writers such as Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells and John Galsworthy.

15 In fact, one of the "positive" examples Woolf uses is a short story by Anton Chekhov.

There are domestic locations in Jean Rhys's and Djuna Barnes's stories, but their domesticity is disturbed in one way or another. The house interiors described from the point of view of focalizers or character narrators tend to be someone else's homes, where the focalizer is only a visitor. The places of dwelling for the focal characters, if they appear in the stories, do not come across as home-like, often on the verge of public space. Houses and other private interior spaces that are not domestic in the sense of being the focalizer's "own" can still figure strongly as felt, lived spaces, and spaces for experiencing time as well, by virtue of the multisensory engagement with materialities that the stories invite, and the focalizer's point of view they lend for it. Furthermore, the houses of Barnes and Rhys are rarely closed spaces, clearly separate from the world outside; rather, the exterior world seems to be on the verge of invading many of the interiors, and different liminal spaces, like verandas and terraces, are constructed between inside and outside. This complicates the way interiors can be seen to construct the subjectivity of characters, for instance. The short story form itself has been seen as a liminal space, beyond social constraints and between traditions such as allegorical and realist, oral and literary, and between identification and detachment (Achilles & Bergmann 2015; Brosch 2015, 92). The potential for inconclusiveness in the short story form may also leave readers in liminal spaces of their own (Brosch 2015, 98).

Questioning ideas and ideologies related to houses, homes, interiors and dwelling is not a unique feature in Rhys and Barnes; especially modernist women writers have challenged and reimagined domesticity in various ways (see Foster 2002; Wilson 2011, 434). According to Miruna Stanica, the whole concept of the 'interior' is a modern phenomenon, arising along with the 19th century bourgeois phenomena of increasing privacy, private property and leisure for many (Stanica 2014, 514), something that was, again, beginning to be challenged at the beginning of the 20th century. Earlier research has linked both Rhys and Barnes with the modern challenges to domesticity, focusing especially on their use of "liminal" or "threshold" spaces (used more or less synonymously): spaces of transition and transformation located between concrete spaces, usually interior and its outside, as well as metaphorical spaces and stages in what Bahktin would call biographical time (Johnson 2015; Mulholland 2012; Wilson 2011). In the following, these studies are considered, while the focus is on the lived materiality of the concrete domestic-liminal spaces and their temporal connections evoked in the stories. I suggest that the stories' experiential evocations of the nonhuman, material contents of spaces, play an important role in the ways Rhys and Barnes challenge and reimagine domesticity. The first subsection discusses Rhys's houses as gendered spaces and the ways this space is made unstable by practices described recently by Erica L. Johnson and Patricia Moran (2015, 6, 8) as "haunting." I argue that the sense of haunting is produced largely by way of the manipulation of embodied relations with the material world. The second subsection discusses the

liminality of Barnes's domestic spaces, which are likened to those of the theater, and whose boundaries are challenged by focalizing solutions that blend characters and their physical locations with a wider expanse of space.

### 2.1.1. Solid and Shaky Houses

The most intense presence of a single house is Jean Rhys's short fiction is in the appropriately named story "A Solid House" (1963).[16] Part of Rhys's later work, published after *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is set in an unspecified city in England at the time of the Second World War, during an air raid and some days after it. Narrated in third person, the story is focalized by Teresa, who shares an apartment with Miss Spearman, an older woman. It is implied that her housing is temporary, and she has just moved in. The story begins with the two characters hiding in the cellar during the raid, and continues in numbered sections, each taking place in a different room.

> Pressed flat against the cellar wall, they listened to the inexorable throbbing of the planes. And above them the house waited, its long, gloomy passages full of echoes, shadows, creakings—rats, perhaps. But the square outside was calm and indifferent, the trees cleaner than in a London square, not smelling the same, either.
>
> "Anything?" Miss Spearman asked.
>
> "Gone, I think," Teresa said, and made signs.
>
> She remembered playing hide-and-seek in a cellar very like this one long ago. Curious, hide-and-seek. You picked your side (I pick you, I pick you), then suddenly, in the middle, something happened. Everything changed and became horrible and meaningless. But still it went on [...]. (Rhys 1972=*TBL*, 113)

Teresa and Miss Spearman are huddled in the cellar, using their ears to determine the situation, waiting for the moment when silence followed by an "All Clear" signal will tell them that the danger is past. The space leads to an experience of several layers of both time and space in the form of Teresa's memory and imagination. That the house

16 First published in the magazine *Voices* (1963), then in the collection *Tigers Are Better-Looking* (1968).

is also described as waiting creates a sense of projection of mental states to an inanimate entity as a point of departure for personification, which takes part in the sense of slowed time induced by waiting and fear, while the square outside is equally personified but expresses an indifferent mood.

The beginning of this passage strongly evokes the fictional bodies of the characters, pressed against the wall, listening, communicating with one another and being transported to memories. If we view mental processes as embedded in and possibly extending into the world, enactive and embodied, the location of a body in space is central to the cognitive processing of a work of fiction as experiential (Brosch 2015, 99). It can be argued that the experientiality of Rhys's passage is anchored in them and in their embeddedness in the material environment. Marco Caracciolo (2011; 2014b, 160), discusses readers' interaction with narrative space as an embodied projection into the storyworld, and suggests that by virtue of the similar embodied structure of perception and imagination (Noë 2004; Kosslyn, Ganis & Thompson 2001), readers experience the storyworld by way of a "virtual body" (Caracciolo 2014b, 161). Texts invite readers to imagine actions and experiences, drawing from their "experiential background" combining sensorimotor and perceptual experience with more complex forms of cognitive and intersubjective experience to enact experience while attributing it to a character or another lived body in the fictional world (Caracciolo 2014b, 159).[17]

According to cognitive scientists and philosophers, "virtuality" is actually an essential part of everyday perception: we experience the world as a detailed whole, even if we only perceive fragments of it at a time, because the world is constantly "there" for us to perceive, and moving our body will result in seeing a different aspect of it (Noë 2004, 75–79, 192, 215). The way things in the world, as three-dimensional entities, are present to us, is therefore virtual. It can be suggested that fictional space appears to us in the same manner, with the capacity for sensing virtual presence applied to making sense of the fictional world, its spatiality and temporality. If we accept the presence of a virtual component in all perception, we do not necessarily refer to the immersion into a fictional space, like the cellar in which Teresa and Miss Spearman are hiding, as "projection" (cf. Caracciolo 2014b, 162). The space the story offers becomes one feature of the bodily experience of a reader engaging with the story and imaginatively enacting its space. Encountering fictional things in this space, readers draw on the resources of virtual perception they are accustomed to use in their everyday dealings with the lived, material world.

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17 Caracciolo (2014b, 173) sketches a "scale of fictionalization," arguing that "strict," (Jahn 1996), character-bound focalization and so-called deputy focalizers (alleged subjects other than characters exploring the fictional world) afford a higher degree of fictionalization and enhance the effect of transportation, while readers struggle to experientially enact the fictional space of texts where focalization is not so clearly bound to a fictional body. I will argue that we cannot always equate the potential feeling of being transported with the presence of the body of a character or a deputy focalizer.

In the passage at the beginning of "A Solid House," Teresa's (and also, arguably, Miss Spearman's) fictional body clearly offers itself as a site of bodily experience. The evocation of the characters' bodies "pressed flat against the cellar wall" creates a strong cue for the reader's "sensory imagination" (Caracciolo 2014b, 93–94), and invites an enactment on the part of the reader who will have sensorimotor experience of being pressed "flat" against something. The "throbbing" of the planes refers to an aural sensation that suggests a presence of the source of the sound outside the immediately perceived space. The aural is mixed with the proprioception and tactility of pressing against the wall, as throbbing is usually something felt in the body rather than heard. This is an instance of conceptual blending, metaphorical use of language that refers to one domain of (sensory) experience to create an impression of another experience (Lakoff & Turner 2002; Lakoff & Johnson 2003, 3; Caracciolo 2014b, 106), still intensely embodied.

After having introduced the situation in an experientially effective way, the text itself evokes the virtual potential of everyday perception and imagination. Firstly, the house above cannot be directly perceived by the characters, but the passage suggests that its presence can still be felt, by virtue of the detailed references to sounds and shadows and the speculation of there being rats that Teresa appears to be going through, presented in free indirect discourse. Teresa could have felt the gloomy ambience of the passages of the house earlier; on the other hand, rats are introduced as their potential inhabitants and experiencers. Secondly, the same goes for the square outside, which evokes a highly personalized experience of its sights, ambience, and smell, compared to another imaginary place in London, equally virtually present. Interestingly, the text blends the experience of the focal character with the independent material being of the house and the square, while both are also portrayed as personified agents: the house "wait[s]" and the square is "indifferent." There is a fictionally actual body inviting readerly projection, but the experiences offered by it extend beyond its boundaries, attributing independent being and agency to material entities outside the immediate reach of the fictional experiencer, thereby bringing them within the reach of the embodied reader. Finally, Teresa's memory of playing hide-and-seek appears to be evoked by the lived space of the cellar, and the "horrible" characteristics of this remembered experience are set as parallel to the "fictionally actual" experience of hiding in the cellar.

The perspective could be said to shift between Teresa's "strict" focalization and broader "zero" focalization (Genette 1980, 188–189), but everything described could also be ascribed to Teresa's memory and imagination. This ambiguity colors the house and the square

with affective significance as spaces experienced by the focal character, and potentially by the reader by way of enactment, as making certain sounds, smelling a certain way and having a certain ambience. The recollection of hide-and-seek is not set in a specific space, but the ambience of fear that defines the cellar as a lived space for Teresa seems to be present in the memory as well; the lived space "affords" the memory, while the memory could be seen to make part of the set of previous experiences with which Teresa encounters the space and constructs it as affording certain actions and moods (Herman 2011a, 259). Thereby, the point of view is certainly Teresa's, but simultaneously the perspective shifts from the stuffy, experientially evoked cellar to other spaces and times. This is a central technique in Rhys's work, often showing remembered or imagined spaces as overlapping with the actual locations of the narrative. A reader of fiction is most likely used to such shifts in time and space, and recognizes them as textual devices, while also perhaps recognizing them experientially as something encountered in lived experience. In the situation of reading, the feeling of being in another time and place is bound to intersect with "higher" cognitive capacities such as memory and imagination, ultimately leading to sociocultural meanings in the interpretation: hide-and-seek, which is described by Teresa as a rather sinister pastime, is compared with the war-time situation and Teresa's mental state in the story.

The technique of juxtaposing levels of time and space in "A Solid House" works to destabilize the sense of the interior space by constantly introducing the "other space" of memory, dream, or imagination; Michel Foucault has called this *heterotopia.* Foucault's concept combines the material and metaphorical space. It can refer to a concrete space or mental space experienced in a moment in time, which is defined by otherness in relation to some hegemonic order. A heterotopia is not an imaginary place set in the future or the past, like a utopia or dystopia, but a "real" space that introduces something virtual or unreal: "The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 1986, 25). It also implies a break in the experience of time (Ibid., 26). The notion of heterotopia is a fitting denominator especially for the movements of the narrating voice between real and imagined or remembered spaces and temporalities, and the way a reader can virtually participate in such movements.[18] This order, in Rhys's case, seems to be that of dwelling and domesticity, and the gendered power-relations it implies at a certain historical moment. This is never voiced straightforwardly in the text, but implied subtly by Teresa's depressed thoughts and behavior and their pairing with her experience of the space, and the heterotopias afforded by it. One of the rooms leads Teresa to imagine the hereafter, to which the norms of the world seem to have followed



18 It could be argued that literature itself is constantly constructing heterotopias for its readers.

her in the form of fantasy images of sinister, idealized personages blended with the flowers and the cellar she has actually perceived:

> No, if I slept here I'd dream. I'd dream of monstrous humming birds, cellars, flowers under glass, gentlemen with china-blue eyes, ladies with smooth shoulders who will never lack the still pastures and the green waters, the peaceful death, the honoured grave—all this, and Heaven too—who will never, never lack the sense of superiority nor the disciplined reaction nor the proper way to snub nor the heart like a rock nor the wrist surprisingly thick. Nor the flower of the flock to be sacrificed. (*TBL*, 126–127)

In this indirect manner, the reader gets an idea of Teresa's experience of the social reality of her actual life. Often, the story merely points out a general depressed mood, expressed by her relation to some detail in the interior. Teresa pictures a beyond with ladies and gentlemen gracefully adhering to norms of beauty and honor, and imagines them snubbing and sacrificing, and, arguably, herself as the object of these actions. These associations manifest in her relationship to the lived space of the room as a pattern of avoidance, something Thomas Fuchs (2012, 74–75) has called "gravitational effects" of avoidance: the affordances of the space and thereby the actions taken by Teresa are changed by virtue of traumatic experience or other form of distress. The reader does not learn much about Teresa's distress, and the text does not invite a specific psychiatric diagnosis; rather, it seems to point to the distress as a problem of society rather than of an individual.

Between the air raid and the passage quoted above, in the second numbered section of the story, the women are having tea in the living room, and a descriptive list of what it contains is produced: "There were two red plush armchairs near the fire, a patchwork rug, a calendar with a picture of cats, a round table with a wool mat in the middle, a large black cupboard and, on the walls, some old prints of soldiers in full dress [...]" (*TBL,* 105). Even in safety, Teresa is shown to suffer from anxiety or depression related to time, which she addresses as a symbolic "other clock," evoked in her mind by an actual clock: "She put her hand over her eyes, which felt sore, and listening to the noisy clock, thought about that other clock ticking so slowly, the watch on the table ticking so fast. But the same seconds, or they said the same seconds" (*TBL*, 119). The noisy clock and the watch on the table, the material markers of passing time in the scene in addition to the calendar, are contrasted with Teresa's personal experience of time. The imaginary and actual clocks are shown to be irreconcilable, even

if the units they measure are the same. The material anchors of clocks and calendars present time as something that can be included in the sensory enactment of the story, while the other items listed variously point to domestic comfort and the extra domestic reality of war.

Teresa's lived body and experience seem to transcend the boundaries of time and space. In the third section, Teresa nearly moves to another space and time entirely, as she overdoses on sleeping pills and whiskey in an episode narrated briefly, in a very matter-of-fact manner. It is followed by an equally plain passage of her waking up after all and returning to the space of the house, while Miss Spearman has not noticed anything out of the ordinary. In the fourth section, Miss Spearman opens the door of another room for Teresa, who has never before visited it. This room contains even more things than the living room, again elaborately listed: gold brocade curtains, stuffed birds, pictures, "a mirror in a silver-green frame, and glass paperweights through which could be seen roses, carnations and violets [...] jade vases, and the Woolworth's glass mats" (*TBL,* 125). Teresa wonders, thinking about the other contents of the room, whether there is also a "musical box." The room provides different paths of association instead: "there was no musical box, but there were Japanese wind-glasses, again from Woolworth's, hanging over the door into the garden" (*TBL,* 126), which are again a reminder of the actuality of the war and the conemporary age as bought from an affordable department store, while the other things in the room point toward an earlier, perhaps turn-of-the-century reality. She also wonders about the purpose of the birds and their connection with a nearby note: "I believe in the Resurrection of the Dead" (*TBL,* 125), which is later revealed to be connected with the spiritualist séances Miss Spearman has a habit of organizing: another way of bringing forth a different reality within the domestic space.

Teresa's visit to the room begins with a highly perspectival observation of the space as "a long, narrow, pathetic room" (*TBL,* 125) and ends with her walking restlessly in the room, having her vision of the hereafter with its supercilious inhabitants as quoted above. The room and its contents appear as potential openings to a dream space, which Teresa finds frightening. Sleep and death are intermingled in this space, with the allusions to spiritualism combined with Teresa's memories of the suicide attempt and a longing to sleep, and perhaps die. Teresa approaches some of the things as clues that she tries to piece together, but quickly the narrative replaces this interest with sleepy reverie, during which the things become gateways to another space. The dream space is equally unhome-like as the actual space she inhabits. It is peopled by the dismissive, comically presented honorable ladies and cold-eyed gentlemen who expect to do as well in the afterworld as they have in this one. The vivid and specific description of the things inside the "solid house" opens the fictional experience toward heterotopias and uncanny external dream spaces. Teresa as the proxy-experiencer of the story does not linger on the interior objects. None of the contents of the "long, narrow, pathetic room,"

is described from the point of view of Teresa's sensory experience, while her dreamy associations come to seem more vivid. The material things are listed and serve as anchors in the fictional world, while the experience of the character wanders from actual to virtual space and invites the reader to follow. The presence of the stuffed birds and armchairs, wind-glasses and timepieces invites an embodied enactment simply by virtue of being recognizable objects whose readiness for the reader's virtual sense experience has a weight of "actuality," even though the character is not shown interacting with them. This sense of actuality, then, is contrasted with the fleeting lightness of the virtual spaces of Teresa's imagination.

The tension between heaviness and lightness, solidity and shakiness is cultivated throughout the story. The two women discuss the house: "'It's a lovely old house', Miss Spearman said. 'Solid' / 'Yes, lovely and solid', Teresa said" (*TBL*, 121); their comments reflect a concretely relevant concern, during the time of air raids. Teresa, however, continues in her mind: "But how can you tell? The other one was solid, too" (*TBL,* 121–122). This mention of the "other house," comparable to the earlier "other clock," leads to a dreamy description of a house, which she has seen in her sleep during the suicide attempt. In this heterotopia, clearly located outside the hegemonic solidity of the house, Teresa's body and its senses seem to be far more involved than in the actual fictional space. She describes paddling on a river ("[t]he paddle did not make any sound, the dead leaves slowed the punt down," *TBL,* 122), the visual details of the house, a statue of a woman holding a cloth around her body (inviting mimetic empathy of sensation), and the green smoothness of a lawn. This, too, is ultimately an unhome-like dream, as Teresa is not admitted, although she thinks: "I knew that if I could pass the statues and touch the tree and walk into the house, I should be well again" (*TBL,* 122). Her not being well seems to manifest as being "out of touch," a conceptual metaphor literalized in the sense of the distance of her body from concrete material things in the actual and dream worlds of the narrative.

After her suicide attempt, Teresa thinks: "Shall I tell her what it feels like to be dead?" (*TBL,* 122). The dream passages in the story indeed attempt something like this, creating a mixture of intense embodied feeling and uncanny unreality of time and space. Things in the dreams, even if unaccommodating, still become closer to vividness and affective value than the ones inside the "solid house." The story ends with Teresa drifting to sleep in yet another room, her imagination conjuring up a woman "in the front garden of Number Seven," a neighboring house, pushing her hair off her forehead, stretching and yawning, and a ginger cat dancing. These specific images of other spaces evoke tactile and sensorimotor experiences that become more real than those of

the actual surroundings. Teresa's description of the dream spaces gives more vivid cues for imagining them in a bodily manner. The experiential rendering of both physical and ontological instability within solid material frames gives notions like heterotopia and transcendence, as well as social anxieties related to the insecurity of the future and the relations between the two women (of which more will be said in the final part of this chapter), a lived dimension. A reader of the story can consciously infer the sociocultural meanings, but they are colored and supported by a more basic form of making sense of the lived space and time in the story; this may render some of the ambiguities of space even more inscrutable. The way Teresa's experience of the actual interior is "diluted" as opposed to her vivid recollections exemplifies mental distress, but also locates it in the social sphere. There is no need to diagnose Teresa to understand the distress. Portraying the heterotopias as more experientially vivid than the actual narrative setting also suggests the potential experiential strength of imagination and hallucination as a means of exit from an unhomely space.

The solid house is an ambivalent interior, like many others in Rhys's fiction. Luce Irigaray criticizes the phenomenological focus on dwelling and the home as "man's" mode of being, stating that for woman, the envelope of a home can be "visibly limiting or sheltering, but at the risk of being prison-like or murderous if the threshold is not left open" (Irigaray 1993, 11). As Iris Marion Young (2005, 131) points out, Irigaray's comment presupposes a bourgeois order of living and gender relations that does not apply universally; the presupposition of a binary order of gender can be added to the list. These spaces may indeed be "lovely" or "solid," but they still evoke a sense of repulsion, in a concrete manner pushing the focal character away toward other, imaginary spaces. "Kikimora" in *Sleep It off Lady* (1976) experiements with the thematic of the bourgeois interior in all its "murderous" potential, following Irigaray's dramatic expression. A man called Baron Mumtael visits Elsa's home to wait for her husband, and makes barely masked rude comments (interpreted so by Elsa, the focalizer), moving from her clothes to the interior:

> "What a very elegant dinner suit you are wearing," said Baron Mumtael mockingly.
>
> "Yes, isn't it ... oh, I don't think it is really," said Elsa distractedly. "I hate myself in suits," she went on, plunging deep into the scorn of his pale blue eyes.
>
> "The large armchair is of course your husband's and the smaller one yours," said the baron quirking his mouth upwards. "What a typical interior! Where shall I sit?"
>
> "Sit wherever you like," said Elsa. "The interior is all yours. Choose your favourite bit." (Rhys 1976=*SIOL*, 95)

The Baron seems to be imposing a gender-based order on both the room and Elsa, who at first offers the sarcastic answer above, then begins contesting him on the topics of whether a painting is

by a woman (it is by a man), and whether their cat, Kikimora, is a "she-cat" (it is a "he-cat"). The details of the interior in this story are only transmitted to the reader through the Baron's comments and Elsa's responses. From them, the reader senses the constrained social norms involving "typical interiors" (apparently referring to British/English ones) and "feminine charm," and a somewhat futile attempt to challenge them. After the visit (which ends with the cat scratching the Baron), Elsa takes revenge on the material world, namely her "elegant dinner suit," which she cuts up with scissors, telling her husband: "I'm destroying my feminine charm" (*SIOL*, 99). The rules by which the Baron interprets the interior, its things, and its inhabitants, make it a repulsive space for Elsa, who distances herself from it ("the interior is all yours"). She, however, seems to attempt liberation by destroying a piece of apparel.

From the point of view of the experiential "feel" associated with the whole story, not only Elsa's experience, this makes the most sense. While the sociocultural norms that the Baron introduces can be interpreted by the reader using higher-order understanding, they are accompanied with a *sense* of constraint. This sense, I argue, is produced by the interior setting, the rhythm of the dialogue of repeated misclassifications and attempted retorts, the two characters' uncomfortable closeness ("plunging deep into..."), and the invitation for the reader to "blend" their virtual body with Elsa's fictional one (Caracciolo 2014b, 167), which we know to be clad in a "dinner suit." As Caracciolo (Ibid., 168) suggests, "the leveraging of readers' experiential traces in embodied imaginings can encourage their engagement with the text at the level of sociocultural meanings." In "Kikimora," the suit is introduced immediately. Both Baron Mumtael's comment and Elsa's reply ("I hate myself in suits") construct it as an uncomfortable expression of normative ideas of gender and nationality, but the reader is also invited to enact the feeling of discomfort and self-contempt as accompanied by a clinging tightness around Elsa's body: a "suit" suggests a relatively thick, rigid fabric and a demure cut.[19] From this constraint she releases herself not only by undressing, but also by definitively destroying the constraining fabric. The embodied metaphor of the suit can produce a vivid understanding of the sociocultural meanings. It can also feed back into the reader's experiential background, possibly creating new understanding of the tightness of a bourgeois gender order. As can be seen in the analyses to come,

19 'Dinner suit' is also, interestingly, a term used principally for men's attire, whereby gender in the story comes forth even more strongly as a performance or masquerade involving deceptive facades and arbitrary norms.

clothes and especially dresses are central to Rhys's writing both as material things and metaphorical entities. In this light, it is quite logical that an emotional drama is acted out by way of violent interaction with a suit.

In some of the houses that Rhys describes, the sense of repulsion an interior elicits is even more obvious. In "Till September Petronella" (1960), a vague sense of being shut overwhelms Petronella, the narrator in her Bloomsbury bed-sit. In the story, she escapes upon invitation to a male friend's country cottage, but she eventually escapes from there, too. Objects in her room are personified, "tormenting" her as recollections even in the pleasant countryside bedroom: "[...] the way the sun shone on the black iron bedstead in my room in Torrington Square on fine days. The bars of the bedstead grin at me. Sometimes I count the knobs on the chest of drawers three times over" (*TBL,* 16). A fine day does not keep the bedstead and the room from appearing hostile. The image of the iron bars is repeated after Petronella's friend tries to console her: "The world is big. There's hope." "Not for me," she thinks, after imagining the bars of her bedstead (*TBL*, 28). For Petronella, the world is the size of a Bloomsbury bed-sit, whose iron bars remind her of a prison.[20]

As George Lakoff and Mark Turner (1989, 34–46) suggest, time can be metaphorically conceived of as "thief," "devourer," or "destroyer," a moving entity that may pursue one on the metaphorical "journey of life," as well as a physical substance. When Petronella leaves her room for the countryside, the landlord[21] remarks good-naturedly, quoting a music-hall song: "So there's a good time coming for the ladies, is there?—a good time coming for the girls? About time too" (*TBL*, 10–11). The final comment suggests that there has not been much "good time" before, which based on the context of the sentence means being invited out, meeting men. The statement appears ironic, however, as the "good time" at the cottage turns out to mean Petronella getting in the middle of drunken dramas of jealousy, and as the story continually points toward time itself as a lived experience of a substance that runs out and escapes.

Having left the cottage after a row, Petronella gets a lift from a man who leaves her waiting at a pub, where she encounters a material anchor of time:

> Tea and cakes were laid in a small, dark, stuffy room. There were three pictures of Lady Hamilton, Johnny Walker advertisements, china bulldogs wearing sailor caps and two calendars. One said January 9th, but the other was right—July 28th, 1914. (*TBL*, 25)

20 Later, when Petronella is escorted home by a new male acquaintance, he comments on her front-door key as being "like the key of a prison" (*TBL*, 35).

21 A staple character in Rhys's fiction, usually one positioned on the side of normativity her focal characters or narrators are shown to fight against or suffer from.

The explicit dating of the story events, following the array of trivial pub decorations, appears as highlighted, striking information. For a reader at a later point in time, this may mean the realization of a distance in time, but in the narrative present, it might equally be a realization of how much time has passed since January 9th, and since, perhaps, the "good time for the ladies," if it ever existed. In retrospect, the end of July 1914 carries a sinister foreboding: Archduke Franz Ferdinand has been killed exactly a month before, and the First World War will begin in just four days. This context adds further irony to the prospect of "good times," and even suggests associations of the bric-a-brac to national heroes and the marines. The encounter with the calendar has some effect on Petronella, for when the man comes back and asks what she was thinking about, she "nearly jump[s] out of [her] skin" and answers, "I was thinking about the time" (Ibid.). The man has a ready answer: "About the time? Oh, don't worry about that. There's plenty of time" (Ibid.). Material things, however, are telling her the opposite. At the end of the story she is back in her room, in the early morning hours: "'What's the time?' I thought, and because I wasn't sleepy any longer I sat down in the chair by the window, waiting for the clock outside to strike" (*TBL*, 36); earlier it has been mentioned that it chimes "every quarter-hour" (*TBL*, 31). The clock and the calendar point to time as a perishable entity, and direct the mental activities of the characters toward remembrance or waiting. The title of the story suggests another, longer wait: September is when Petronella agrees to meet both her cottage-owning friend and the new acquaintance in London for the next time—something that would probably be identified by the landlord as another "good time coming for the ladies," while the story rather suggests this as a sinister form of eternal return.[22]

How can the abstract notion of time be conveyed to an embodied experience in the reader, or can it? My suggestion is that stories like "Till September Petronella" achieve this by way of embodied metaphors. According to Lakoff and Mark Johnson's seminal work (1999), what they call "conceptual metaphors" in each language have their roots in our embodied being and sensorimotor interaction with the world, whereby our abstract thinking is largely based on the way we experience the material reality as things and substances with surfaces and dimensions that we can feel and move. Their approach uses the concept of metaphor in a considerably broader sense than

22 The notion of eternal return has been also connected with fashion and modernity by Walter Benjamin (1999, 4–5, 544) and Sophie Oliver (2016) has shown its effect specifically through fashion in Rhys's fiction. Andrew Thacker (2009, 202) links a similar instance of a chiming church bell in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* paradoxically to a sense that time has stood still while the main character has been out of hearing distance of the familiar bell.

most literary studies, but for its main argument the theory of conceptual metaphor can also contribute to discussions of literary metaphor. Rhys plays with the basic, frozen metaphorical expressions used in the English language for time ("a good time"; "about time"; "there's plenty of time"; "what's the time?"). At the same time, these customary metaphors of understanding time as a substance or an agent are connected with focal characters' bodily experiences of being constrained within "small, dark, stuffy" interior spaces or constantly moving from one space and place to another.

According to Mary Lou Emery (2015, 59–60), Rhys's use of liminal spaces such as verandas and terraces is parallel with the mixed area of dreaming and being awake, transformations of power, and potential violence (Ibid., 63); interestingly, the row in "Till September Petronella," also takes place on a veranda. Emery discusses especially the novels and stories set in a colonial context, and explores the cultural and historical meanings involved in such short stories as "Mixing Cocktails," "Again the Antilles" (1927) and "Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers" (1976). However, the same dynamic of liminality or mixing inside and outside also seems to be an important feature in two late short stories set mostly in rural England. *Sleep It off Lady* can be seen as an auto fictional collection in that its different temporal and spatial settings resemble those in Rhys's biography, from childhood in the Caribbean Antilles to school and a brief theatre career in England to life in Paris of the 1920s; wartime in English cities and old age in the English countryside are the subjects of two stories, "Who Knows What's up in the Attic?" and "Sleep It off Lady," which precede the final story of the collection.

Both these stories, unlike Rhys's other work, feature protagonists who live in a house alone. The anonymous focalizer of "Who Knows What's Up in the Attic" is met in the liminal space of the passage leading to her front door by Jan, a young Dutch writer whom she has invited to come to visit earlier (it is implied that the elderly, female focalizer is also a writer). Before Jan's arrival, she has been "sitting in the kitchen of her cottage looking out of the window at the dismal sky and listening to the silence" (*SIOL*, 148). The sky and the weather of Southwest England become part of the inner space of the cottage as they contribute to a sense of confinement, hints of which are given throughout the story. Jan's arrival, on the other hand, marks a change in the weather:

> She sat so often in this chair looking at the eternal drizzle, listening to the wind. All night it whistled and whined and moaned, rattled the doors and windows till she had to get up and wedge them with newspapers before she could sleep [...].
>
> But today the sun was real sun and the light gold. The grass was yellow, not green. No wonder she felt as if she were in another time, another place, another country. (*SIOL*, 152–153)

The outdoors affects the indoors of this not-so-solid cottage as the wind with all its sounds blows in and disturbs the material boundaries of the house, appearing entirely hostile ("the bullying treacherous wind," Ibid.). The wind makes the whole place disagreeable; once again it induces longing for "another time, another place, another country," a taste of which enters the fictional space with the visitor.

Jan extends the feeling of spaciousness and possibility by inviting the writer to stay in a summer house in Italy. She, however, refuses. After Jan has left, she wonders about her decision:

> "Why shouldn't I walk out of this place, so dependent on the weather, so meanly built, for poor people. Just four small rooms and an attic. Like my life." She put her hand to her head and laughed. "And who knows what's up in the attic? Not I for one. I wouldn't dare look."
>
> A small house—it was suffocating. She went to the door and propped it open. Why not? Why not? (*SIOL*, 155)

The house and the body of the focalizer are used as metaphors for her life and consciousness, where the attic stands for something repressed.[23] With a technique similar to "A Solid House," "Kikimora," and "Till September Petronella," the sense of being shut within a too tight and stuffy space (and time) and its sociocultural meanings (here, for instance, the writer's contempt for a house that is fit "for poor people"), are paired with a metaphor that invites bodily enactment on the part of the reader. Thereby, in addition to playing with the metaphorical meanings of the house as an image of the self, the text invites its readers to go through an embodied experience of what it is like to be in a suffocating space; this is another experience that most readers can be assumed to have experiential traces of, in one form or another. Propping the door open is then a simultaneously material and metaphorical action. Even if the house has from the beginning seemed to be "open" to visitors and the wind, it does seem capable of shutting in its inhabitant. However, with irony typical of Rhys, opening the door does not lead to her leaving, but to the intrusion of another character, who brings a further ambiguous dimension to the story, the discussion of which will be resumed in the final part of this chapter.

The setting of "Sleep It off Lady" resembles the preceding story. Narrated in third person, it is also focalized by Miss Verney, another elderly woman. The troubling space in this story is comparable to

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23 The topos of the attic with a metaphorical dimension of hiding something repressed in Rhys figures most famously in *Wide Sargasso Sea,* the rewritten life of the "madwoman in the attic," *Jane Eyre*'s Bertha Mason, whose final moments are narrated in another liminal space, the battlements of the country house (see Emery 2015, 75).

the attic of the previous one, only its presence is more concrete. Miss Verney is frightened by a shed in her yard, and unsuccessfully tries to get a builder to tear it down. Her fear becomes worse when she sees, or thinks she sees, an enormous rat. She becomes obsessed by a sense of threat which materializes in both the rat and the shed. She is also feeling ill and is prescribed medication by a slightly worried doctor. Once again, a change of weather brings about temporary change of emotion. On a beautiful day ("[t]he sky was pale blue. There was no wind." *SIOL* 169), Miss Verney feels better, but after lifting some heavy objects in her rush of energy, she collapses by the shed. A neighbor's child refuses to help her because of her reputation as a drunk; she spends the night outside, is finally taken to the hospital but dies "of shock and cold" (*SIOL*, 172), probably affected by a heart condition for which the medication has been prescribed.

The shed is a space outside the house, but it is also one that invades the domestic one. It is at the mercy of time and weather like the cottage in the previous story: "Most of the paint had worn off the once-black galvanized iron. Now it was a greenish colour. Part of the roof was loose and flapped noisily in windy weather" (*SIOL*, 160). Inside, the shed is "astonishingly large" (Ibid.), and full of material things characterized by decay, dirt, and disuse. It is through these things that the disturbing ambience of the space is first constructed:

> Nails festooned with rags protruded from the only wooden rafter. There was a tin bucket with a hole, a huge dustbin. Nettles flourished in one corner but it was the opposite corner which disturbed her. Here was piled a rusty lawnmower, an old chair with a carpet draped over it, several sacks, and the remains of what had once been a bundle of hay. She found herself imagining that a fierce and dangerous animal lived there [...]. (*SIOL*, 160)

The dirty, rusty, decayed things and the presence of nettles flourishing indoors are another way of destabilizing the interior, and showing how time and the forces of nature work on its surfaces. The body of Miss Verney is identified with the things in the shed, as she is shown to be depressed by ageing ("Left alone, Miss Verney felt so old, lonely and helpless that she began to cry," *SIOL*, 161). Her preoccupation with the shed seems to run parallel in time with the worsening of her condition.[24]

Miss Verney tries to protect herself by cleaning inside her house and dragging furniture away from the walls, to gain visibility of anything that might be lurking in the corners; she also shuts and bolts the windows in the direction of the shed and piles heavy stones on the

24 The imaginary beast of the passage, which appears in the fictional world the form of the large black rat, also becomes a metaphorical entity, a bad omen or a messenger of death comparable to a raven or a black cat.

dustbin. Ironically, however, it is moving objects around that brings about her death, combined with the prejudice and indifference of neighbors. The story uses the liminal space of the shed, and the parallels between the shed and the house, to mix invitations to imagine something heavy, solid and closed (the shut windows, the furniture, dustbins with stones on them), with evocations of airiness, crumbling and openness (wind blowing through the shed, its decayed collection of things, the opening between the shed and the yard and the open dustbins). Both are felt qualities of the lived space, and both are experienced as menacing by Miss Verney. Unlike Barnes's Madame's, her enemies seem to be time and loneliness, but they become manifest in the felt enmity of the space.

Readers of this story can use the livedness of the space evoked in the narrative in combination with their cultural knowledge to interpret what is read. The introduction of the lived spaces of the shed and the house, and the material things in them, involve the reader in Miss Verney's experiences, which appear *as though they were real* even though they may be partly hallucinatory also in the fictional world; her experience, in any case, is real. A reader may doubt whether the rat is "actually" there and wonder why the shed should be so terrifying, but the story nevertheless makes its readers live through some version of the fear and disgust attributed to its protagonist. These they can combine to culturally understood meanings of ageing and death, and the symbolism that points to them, with the added themes of alcoholism and social prejudice. Similarly, the previous story connects the experiential ambience of the house with cultural parallels between house, the human body and mind.

The collection *Sleep It off Lady* is built around a quasi-biographical "plot," but it does not end with this death, however. In the last story, "I Used to Live Here Once," the space around a house becomes the meeting place of different levels of time, reminiscent of the "other house" in "A Solid House," in the earlier collection. It is a very short, third-person descriptive account of a woman, on a "fine day, a blue day," walking toward a familiar house, which she has not seen for a long time (*SIOL,* 175). The setting a Caribbean island, which is the same as that of the first stories of the collection. She recognizes stepping stones and has detailed recollections of which one used to be safe and which one unsteady. The garden has changed due to lack of maintenance, and the road is wider than before; the house has been "added to and painted white" (Ibid.). Feeling her heart beating, she stands in front of the steps, but as in "A Solid House," this is as far as she gets: she attempts to greet two children playing in the garden, but they do not hear or see her, only wonder if it has "gone cold all of a sudden" (*SIOL,* 176). "That was the first time she knew," is the final

line of the story (Ibid.). This suggests that the story is focalized by a ghost who does not at first realize she is one. It adds another level of heterotopical juxtaposition in time and space, beyond the narrative present, dreams, and past memories, appearing as a more developed rendering of the house seen in the deathlike dream by Teresa in "A Solid House." The story is in an intriguing relation with autobiographical writing, which Paul de Man (1979) likens to epitaph and prosopopoeia, words from beyond the grave. As Johnson and Moran (2015) suggest, haunting and ghosts are key topoi in many of Rhys's fictions, and add to the understanding of the ambiguous spatiality of the stories. In their depictions of space and time with invitations to quite intense bodily feelings and emotions, her stories combine an experiential dimension with something readers are not supposed to be able to experience, demonstrating the power of fiction: "Shall I tell her what it feels like to be dead?"

The destabilized domestic spaces of Rhys's stories provide several openings in time and space, tentatively shaking the material and cultural meanings of fictional "solid houses." The stories themselves refuse to be textual houses without a draft between window-frames and cracks in the boards, as Woolf put it in the citation that begun this chapter. The fictional houses of the stories show not only the cracks split in them by time, but also their inherent and ideological, socially manifest instability, to do with gendered meanings of space and the narrative form of the story alike. For Rhys's characters, houses may be more vividly depicted in dreams, hallucinations, or an imaginary after-life than "real" houses. Yet both actual and imaginary details of the storyworld are used to invite the reader's sensory imagination and enactment, and the virtual bodily experience of fictional spaces. Rhys's work is often seen as characterized by a sense of rootlessness and alienation, or constantly belonging elsewhere. As I suggest in subsequent chapters, it could also be argued that many of the stories are actually *about* belonging, but this belonging is never commensurable with the house as a domestic space. The preceding analyses have shown that the inherent ambiguity of belonging to and inhabiting spaces and experiencing time is created by subtle metaphors and irony, but that their meaningfulness also rests on experientiality, which is constructed largely by references to "lived things," material entities in the interior that are present in the characters' fictional bodily actions and experiences. Rhys's readers might feel "confined and shut in" in a "bright yet narrow room," as Woolf fears readers of some fiction might feel, instead of "enlarged and set free" (Woolf 1948, 191), but this seems to be an intentional choice aiming to reveal how sociocultural constraints affect the lived experience of time and space.

## 2.1.2. Disregarded and Decaying Houses

> "[W]hat are you going to be when you grow up into a fine strapping woman, and have a house to yourself, with curtains to every window, a new calico gown with tucks all over it, and six eggs in the cupboard?"
> "I shall run away," said Elsie sweetly.
>
> — Djuna Barnes: *Ryder*[25]

Djuna Barnes's stories feature more actual houses than Rhys's, but they are not homelike either. Mary Wilson has discussed this at length in relation to *Nightwood*; she suggests that "[h]ome in *Nightwood*, like the characters in the novel, exists in a site of liminality, on social and spatial margins" (Wilson 2011, 431). Wilson points out that *Nightwood* "calls the possibility of feeling at home into question, revealing it to be an illusion of possession and belonging that is either a performance or a trap" (Ibid.). *Nightwood* portrays losses and longings that sometimes have a stable space and a stable (gender) identity as their object, but ultimately show the impossibility of either. The following analyses suggest that Barnes's short stories, not only by their content, but also their form, fit the description of "unhoused fictions" as used by Wilson at least as well as her only novel. Here, too, the attention is on the way the lived experience of the material things encountered in them interact with cultural dynamics and interpretations.

The beginnings of an unstable feeling related to houses and other domestic spaces in Barnes's works are found in their functional features: the spaces often seem to be there mainly for characters to promptly enter and exit. Thus, most of the stories are like theatrical performances. Often at the beginning of a story, upon arrival, there is a sequence of more deliberate description of a house or another space where the central events take place, while in the rest of the story description is scarcer. Stories, such as "Aller et Retour" (1924) and "Spillway" (1919), are both discussed at length in the later chapters of this study as they begin with depictions of characters travelling toward a house that has been but no longer is their home, but still is the milieu of the climax of the story. In "Aller et Retour," Madame von Bartmann comes to see her daughter after the death of the father; in "Spillway," Julie Anspacher arrives from a sanatorium, terminally ill

25 1928; Barnes 2010, 161.

with tuberculosis, bringing with her a child of whom her husband knows nothing. There is a sense of temporary narrowing when arriving at the old home, only to stop by and then leave again. This dynamic is also suggested by the title of "Aller et Retour."

Other stories, such as "Cassation" (whose title suggests a stop, cancellation and annulment), "Dusie" (1927) and "A Boy Asks a Question" (1923),[26] are structured around the arrival of the narrators and/or focal characters at a house as guests, and their departure at the end of the story; thus, the story forms a brief static moment in the mobile life of the main characters. The structures of these stories, their use of linguistic archaisms and antiquarian material things, and suggestions of a decayed state of the house and possibly its inhabitants recall a decadent and gothic style. When not leaving or arriving, Barnes's characters seem to frequent threshold spaces that are not quite indoors or outdoors; if they are left within an interior space, at least there tends to be one window open somewhere. The interiors themselves are at times heavy and oppressive, but at the same time not quite contained within themselves. The characters of "Aller et Retour," for instance, move between a garden and the house, often remaining between them, while the house is described as a "heavy house with heavy furniture" (Barnes 1996 = *CS*, 367). Furthermore, stories, such as "A Sprinkle of Comedy" and "The Diary of a Dangerous Child" (1922)[27] feature plots of young boys and girls running away from home. These stories, most of them among Barnes's earlier writings first published in magazines such as *Vanity Fair*, highlight the role of the house as a theatrical space where exact timings are important. They are structured around plots with elements of slapstick comedy and adventure, dependent upon certain people and certain things being in the same place at the same time (see Bahktin 1990, 91–92).

In "A Sprinkle of Comedy" (1917), Roger finds a note revealing that his beloved son is going to run away with a prizefighter named Charlie. The escape, however, will only take place if it does not rain: "Don't exactly like starting an adventure that is likely to alter my life, in the rain," the son writes in the note, which recalls some earlier witticisms reported in the story, portraying the boy as intelligent and delicate but difficult (*CS*, 104).[28] Roger summons his friends, armed with sticks, to surprise and frighten the son. Roger repeatedly puts his hand out the cellar window to check if it is raining; finally, his hand gets wet, and the ambush is dismissed. The water, however, turns out to have come from his wife watering pansies through an upper window, while at the same moment, the son has left.

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26 Originally published as "A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady" in *A Book*; revised version under new title published in Spillway (1962)

27 Published in *Vanity* Fair under the pseudonym Lydia Steptoe.

28 The delicate and eccentric character of the boy is also discussed through references to materiality on a metaphorical level. The worried mother sighs that "the lad is growing strange and of an odd material," to which her husband replies: "If he were material he would be silk." (*CS*, 101)

In "The Diary of a Dangerous Child," a fourteen-year-old girl falls in love and makes an elaborate plan to run away with her imagined future lover (called Don Pasos Dilemma). However, the figure waiting for her, clad in the coat of Don Pasos, is revealed to be her mother. However, the girl is not discouraged; her next plan is to "run away and become a boy" (*CS*, 334). In these stories, gendered identities are everything but stable and solid, and the house, even if it is a "solid" space, appears as one to be left behind. Thus, like Rhys's stories, these accounts do similar cultural work in challenging the connections of woman, home, and family, and question the possibility of stable human subjectivity at the center of the space. In these early stories domestic space is most clearly characterized as scenographically functional space needed for the unfolding of coincidences and plots, where the placing of things (a box of pansies on the window, a Spanish cloak) is key. The reader is not primarily invited to enact these things as something experienced, although they will probably evoke experiential memory. This can be seen as another way of making the interior unstable, as its theatrical connotations make it appear more as a set piece than a three-dimensional space.

Nevertheless, some of Barnes's focalizing techniques also invite experiential responses in readers. In "The Diary of a Dangerous Child," on her night of planned escape, the girl is waiting to jump from the liminal space of the balcony onto horseback. She evokes a theatrical role-model in the Italian actress, Eleonora Duse (1858–1924):

> I thought thoughts of Duse and how she had suffered on balconies a good deal, at least I gathered that she did from most of her pictures.
>
> I too stood on the balcony and suffered side-face. The silver light glided over the smooth balustrade and swam in the pool of gold fishes.
>
> In one hand I held the silver mounted whip. On my head was a modish, glazed riding hat with a single loose feather, falling sideways.
>
> I could hear the tiny enamel clock on my ivory mantle ticking away the minutes. (*CS*, 332)

The narrator of the diary presents herself as an actress accompanied by carefully selected props, and her suffering disposition carefully arranged "side-face," to a comic effect but also composing a *tableau vivant*, a typical means of expression in Barnes's stories. As Michaela Grobbel (2004, 37) observes, "these tableaus frequently signal a caesura or turning point in the narration, and offer a moment of reflection," a moment in which several levels of time coalesce. The

balcony becomes a mixed space between the home and the garden, and, functionally, the home and a stage. The sound of the clock crosses the boundary from the inside and acts as a reminder of the crucial element of passing time, which in this scene equals *timing* the actions according to it. Home is needed for the drama to unfold as a place from which to escape, but the only material aid required is the balcony. This is also the only setting where lighting and material detail, most of it related to the girl, are described. The descriptive attention highlights its importance and downplays that of the house. Knowledge of the contents of the house are not essential to produce virtual, bodily experiences in readers.

The girl's body may function as an anchor for readerly experience, but at the same time the story offers another possibility of virtual perception: the silver of the whip the girl says she is holding blends with the light "gliding over" the balcony structures and toward a pool in the yard. Researchers have suggested ways in which light can be used by authors to direct the reader's attention as a proxy for the focalizer of a story (Fludernik 1996, 198; Caracciolo 2014b, 169). Here a reader can align his or her experiential enactments with a human body on the balcony, but the experientiality can also expand beyond the borders of this body, and further away from the house, as the light becomes "a stand-in for human vision" (Caracciolo 2014b, 169; cf. Scarry 1999, 11–12). The liminality of the setting is brought to the experiential level by the tension between two simultaneously possible strategies of focalization.

Similarly, Barnes's early stories set in New York City barely mention interiors and their things, while what is important and interesting happens somewhere between the house and the street and the other public spaces in the vicinity of the house containing the interior. "Paprika Johnson" (1915) and "Prize Ticket 177" (1917) share a similar setting and similar comic plots centered on two women, their conflicting love interests, and bad timing. "Paprika Johnson," set in lower Manhattan, builds a plot of surprise and misunderstanding on and around a fire-escape, a balcony-like space typical of New York City buildings. Paprika is a young woman sharing an apartment with a friend, who spends her evenings playing the banjo on the eighth-floor fire-escape. Her friend's blind lover has fallen in love with Paprika's voice, thinking it belongs to the friend, while a neighborhood boy has also fallen in love with her after seeing and hearing her from the street below. In addition, her playing has attracted the attention of patrons of the neighborhood beer garden.

The fire escape offers a sense of spaciousness because of its views: "Across the cliff she looked and watched the moon grope its way up the sky and over condensed milk signs and climb to the top of the Woolworth Building" (*CS*, 45). Again, a source of light directs the "gaze tour" of the story away from the house, toward even further locations. When playing her banjo on the fire escape, Paprika is almost at home, almost somewhere "in the city," becoming part of a much larger space away from home. This is how she is seen by the

boy, too: "[h]e had seen Paprika from the beer garden, but Paprika was eight floors distant [...] a silhouette against Manhattan, enhanced as she was by the whole of the left side of the Hudson he came to the conclusion that she was fit for a flat off Bleecker Street with eggs for breakfast" (*CS*, 48). Paprika is enlarged by her surroundings, but the boy thinks he could fit her into his version of a domestic idyll. Due to misunderstandings, Paprika loses the boy, but gains a contract to play for the clients of the beer garden as "the first cabaret artist," and decides to keep her "stage" on the fire-escape (*CS*, 55). A missed chance for domestic happiness, which might have taken place in an apartment on a lower floor, about which she has been dreaming, is compensated in a fairy tale-like manner by a profession and life in a space which is a mixture of the home (she dries her handkerchiefs on the fire escape while playing), the street, the restaurant, and the stage. Paprika appears more as an object viewed by others than as the focal subject of the story; what is most significant experientially is the shifting of attention from the confined interior space to the expanse of the Manhattan silhouette, between which Paprika's body is balanced on the fire-escape.

Even when Barnes does not show her characters on balconies or fire-escapes, she depicts them leaning on windows[29] with the sounds, odors and sights streaming in from outside, usually from a garden. This resembles a potential heterotopia as cited by Foucault because of of the superimposed layers of history and geography (1986, 25–26).[30] In such passages, the feeling of the inner and outer spaces do not appear as separate outside it.

Some of the mixing of indoors and outdoors takes place through the blending of different textures, in another story, "Smoke" (1917) as Little Lief reacts to the impoverishment of her family:

> Her heart broke, but she opened the windows oftener because she needed some kind of beauty. She made the mistake of loving tapestries best and nature second best. Somehow she had gotten the two mixed

29 Barnes uses the word "casement," which implies a type of window opening to the side, and bears associations to earlier, especially gothic literature and its even more archaic spaces, in which there often is no glass in the windows and therefore the contact with the outer world is more direct. Casements appear as places of reflection: In "The Jest of Jests," the narrator remarks, "[S]udden ideas always take us to the casement" (*CS*, 79).

30 Foucault grounds this on a view of Persian garden tradition which he connects rather ambiguously with the "modern zoological gardens," yet the function of a garden as a microcosm of different geographies is plausible, and their links to tradition ally well with the notion of 'heterochrony', a break in temporality that Foucault introduces in the same connection (Foucault 1986, 26).

> — of course, it was due to her bringing up. "If you are poor, you live out-of-doors; but if you are rich, you live in a lovely house." So to her the greatest of calamities had befallen the house. It was beginning to go away by those imperceptible means that at first leave a house looking unfamiliar and then bare. (*CS*, 149)

In this passage, the cultural understandings of wealth and poverty, caricatured in Little Lief's ideas of where the "poor" and the "rich" live, are mixed with the sensory experience of the "beauty" of textures inside and outside the window. This house, too, loses its solidity, both in its bourgeois function of sheltering private property, and as a concrete, lived-in space and thing, in the way its windows are opened more often and in the way it is felt to be "going away" (perhaps in the form of giving up some of the beautiful objects inside it) and becoming bare. For Little Lief, the textures of nature replace those of tapestries, which is a decadent paradox showing the preference for the artificial over the natural. Natural and artificial seem to be purposefully mixed in the story. Instead of a description, the reader is provided with a general suggestion of "texture." This is a rather vague cue for embodied enactments, but still might act as one, by suggesting a sensory imagining of what a texture found in a tapestry equally as in nature might be like and, more importantly, what it would be like to "love" it and find it beautiful.

In "Aller et Retour," Madame von Bartmann approaches the house by a garden lane, where scent, sight and sound form a "tangle of singing textures" (*CS*, 365). The word 'tangle' is used in other stories as well in connection with a natural texture of bushes, branches and grass located in a liminal zone. It expresses an entanglement of artifice and nature, inner and outer (Plumb 1986, 57). Madame first meets Richter in the garden, and even in the evening as she plays the piano, Richter stands in the dark garden, "listen[ing] to Schubert streaming down the light from the open casement" (*CS*, 368); here is another instance of the use of light traversing the boundaries between spaces, and an echo of the synesthesia of "a tangle of singing textures." As the description of the arrival has offered the tangle of textures to the reader's experience, Barnes's way of insisting on the house opening to the garden also brings the feel of those textures inside the house. There, as a comparison, we have interior textures of textiles carefully pointed out: at night, when it is Madame's turn to listen to and comment on Richter's playing, she does so through the curtains of her bed, "with a canopy of linen roses, frilled and smelling of lavender" (*CS*, 371). Thus, the illustrations in the textiles bring the sensory properties, the scents, of the garden indoors.

The garden with its textures is only one of the heterotopias looming within and beyond the domestic interior in Barnes's stories. The places where characters come from, and through which they pass are also present, as the stories are often built around rhythms of arrival and departure: "Aller et Retour" begins with a materially

specific description of Madame coming from Paris, passing through Marseilles (see Section 4.2). Combined with the openness and potential set-piece qualities of the houses and their inseparability from the surrounding gardens, we see that even though some of the means are different from Rhys, a destabilization of the domestic interior also takes place in Barnes's work. Barnes's writing seems to work especially forcefully to challenge symbolic links between the house and the family. In terms of Freudian psychoanalysis, making the home unhomely is associated with *das Unheimliche*, the uncanny: a symptom of a repressed dread of the maternal body and longing for its imaginary, phallic version. In the Freudian framework, a house might be viewed as a symbol for the maternal body (see Freud 1985). This is echoed in humanist geography by for instance Yi Fu Tuan, for whom "the mother is the child's primary place," and "the first enduring and independent object in the infant's world of fleeting impression," which a child needs to leave little by little (Tuan 2001, 29, cf. Young 2005, 124).

Maternity and the family are certainly one central issue of the stories (*Spillway* is even dedicated to "Mother"); in "Aller et Retour," "Spillway," and "Cassation," as well as in most of the later stories, some parodic and controversial version of an Oedipal family comes together briefly under the roof of a house, which does not seem quite strong enough to contain it. Thus, Barnes's stories make the maternal house itself a fleeting entity. Leaving it is easy though always slightly violent, never gradual. Barnes's houses also appear more as "paternal" sites; the father remains in the house while the mother is in the process of returning and leaving again. The heavy but decaying houses enact a decay of patriarchy, as the stories strive to reimagine normative versions of matrimony (cf. Wilson 2011, 446). As Jane Marcus observes (1989, 174), in Barnes it is not only a question of bringing the uncanny into the house, but of rendering the house unreal, so that it barely seems to exist at all, as in the quotation above from "Smoke," in which the house is "going away" by "imperceptible means."

The preceding analyses show that the depiction of a multisensory experience of light, sound, smell and the visual and haptic perception of textures passing the borders of the house, as well as the mixing of natural and artificial textures, and the simple preference for threshold spaces instead of the depths of the interior all contribute to the production of this as an unreality that Wilson's "unhoused," and the general term 'unhomely' might describe better than the Freudian *Unheimliche,* even if psychoanalysis certainly is in an intertextual relation with Barnes's work. Similarly, the scenographic descriptions and locations not only bring the house close to the street and the garden, but to the heterotopia of the theatre. What is implied to be left in the "interior" of the fictional set-pieces is not without significance,

of course, even if it is unmentioned and left to the reader's imagination, but the feel of space is dominated by what is described, as that helps the readers' imagination the most. Often, there seems to be no invitation to even imagine the inside as a virtual presence in the way that was identified in Rhys's stories. This may also be due to Barnes's use of the form of the short story, which creates a need to focus on a significant detail and omit the inessential; however, Barnes's stories do not quite fall within the scope of the "single-effect doctrine": their material detail rarely points toward a single interpretation.

Barnes's stories demonstrate the gendered ambiguity of space and time, as do those of Rhys, but they also take performative action against these "enemies," as they challenge the confines of houses by means of the placement of characters in liminal spaces. In both cases, the narration/focalization traverses spatial boundaries, and shows the decay of oppressive environments in something of a positive light of cheerful comedy, which does not necessarily hide anything sinister.[31] Like Rhys's, Barnes's characters also transgress the boundaries of biographical time with the help of the narrative form, and thereby challenge stable ideas of subjectivity. The Madame of "Madame Grows Older" cited at the very beginning of this chapter escapes from her house to the garden. She writes in her diary about her plan to drown herself in a garden pond, after first having fallen in love, also in the garden, with the young man she had intended for her daughter. The last line of her diary and the story is as follows: "*September nineteenth.* I have killed myself!" (*CS*, 361). The fictionalized diary form, used in a counterfactual manner, enables Madame to speak of her own death in the past tense and bend time beyond normative conceptions.[32] just as Rhys ends the autobiographically organized *Sleep It off Lady* with a story narrated by a ghost. Haunting is a fitting analogy for the way both writers deal with houses, in that they almost allow characters to walk through their walls like ghosts, and to reside in different layers of time simultaneously. Even if such spatiality and temporality are at times close to the fantastic, the way the sensory experience of textures, surfaces and material things is attended to and invited in the reader brings the ghostly paradoxically to life, and creates an embodied understanding of how these haunting stories challenge norms of domesticity.

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31 The complex relationship of positive and negative affect in Barnes is discussed in more detail in Section 4.2. See also, Taylor 2012.

32 The parallel story "The Diary of a Dangerous Child" also plays with the themes of time and growing old. The narrator describes her mind going back to her childhood, like when one is "between life and death," only her mind goes back and forth because of "the distance being so short"—she being so young. She exclaims: "How old one becomes, and how suddenly! I grew old on horseback, between twelve and twelve one" (*CS*, 333).

## 2.2 Public Spaces, Mobility, and Traces of Experience

Rhys's and Barnes's stories destabilize the house as an emblem of domesticity, but the spaces especially Rhys's characters most frequent are outside of this sphere (see Zimmerman 2015, 74). Many of these spaces are liminal by default, in their ambiguous location between private and public, like hotel rooms, in which Rhys's characters spend extended periods of time, making them little different from rented rooms. These spaces, as well as cafés and bars, shops, and streets, have been studied especially in relation to Rhys's work as means of discussing problems of modernity related to the cultural space available in which women may move (Mulholland 2002; Thacker 2009; Zimmerman 2015). As Terri Mulholland (2002, 448) observes, "[p]lacing her characters in these liminal spaces allows Rhys to reflect the spatial, economic and sexual constraints placed on women living alone in the city." There are indeed spaces of constraint in public space, as well as in the home, yet, in both Rhys's and Barnes's stories, the public spaces also appear as places of opportunity: they afford a different, broader variety of action and mobility than the domestic space, even though they may also come with restrictions (see Herman 2011a, 259). Like the liminal space of a balcony or a veranda, hotels and hospitals, streets and cafés are also zones of transition, transformation, and mixing, and can be seen as potential heterotopias allowing for alternative futures or the continuous presence of the past.

This section focuses on the experiential renderings of such public spaces with the help of their materialities. Texts by Djuna Barnes and Jean Rhys are here discussed side by side, as their use of various locations places their texts in a fruitful dialogue with one another. The focus is especially on urban spaces and movement, which are also seen as constitutive of some narrative forms in modernism (Williams 1989, 78). Some of the short stories are specifically crafted to accommodate an urban space in an impressionistic way. The discussion moves from the quasi-domestic spaces of hotel, hospital, and prison, to the more public cafés and streets. How are the "spacious times" of

modernity enacted or challenged in Rhys's and Barnes's writing in these spaces, and how is the lived-ness of these fictional spaces and the possibilities they afford constitutive of the gendered, culturally coded meanings attached to them?

### 2.2.1. The Hotel, the Hospital, and the Prison

> A room is, after all, a place where you hide
> from the wolves. That's all any room is.
>
> — Jean Rhys, interview by Elizabeth Vreeland[33]

In Jean Rhys's work, hotels figure most in the interwar novels, often serving as the only dwelling place of the protagonist both in the narrative present and their remembrances.[34] Hotels are contrasted with the solid, domestic space of houses. In *Quartet,* Marya Zelli muses on her life in hotels: "It lacked the necessary background. A bedroom, balcony and *cabinet de toilette* in a cheap Montmartre hotel cannot possibly be called a solid background" (Rhys 1985, 121). In *The Left Bank,* two stories, "La Grosse Fifi" and "Vienne" (1927) mostly take place in hotels. "La Grosse Fifi" is set on the French Riviera, where Roseau, the focalizer, is staying in a hotel about which she feels ambivalent. Her English friends disapprove of it as a "dreadful place" with a "vile reputation" for deeds of violence (*LB*, 165). They urge Roseau to move out, but she is reluctant to do so. The public spaces of the hotel are not described, except for a person, who is treated almost like a piece of furniture: Fifi, a spectacularly dressed, large, ageing lady staying at the hotel with a young gigolo. This, for Roseau's friends, gives even more reason to flee the hotel, but for Roseau, who has made friends with Fifi, she seems to be the reason to stay, providing security and controversial visual pleasure. The hotel space becomes merged with the character of Fifi, and not only visually: her weight makes the beds creak and her row and reconciliation with the gigolo is heard through wall of Roseau's room. At the latter instance, Roseau thinks: "I must get out of this place," pulling a "friendly sheet" over her head (*LB*, 178).

Sheets, things that are closest to the sense of touch in the particular situation, come to the fore in the narration, while the rest of the room is not described in detail; here we might recall Barnes's preference for

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33 Vreeland 1979, 221. Rhys writes almost the same words in *Good Morning, Midnight* (Rhys 1985, 366).

34 Both Zimmerman (2015) and Mulholland (2002) explore the hotel in *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) as a liminal or threshold space; the former focuses on its relations to the uncanny, the latter on the themes of exile and the search for identity.

fabrics and flat surfaces at the expense of three-dimensional space. Another night, the electric lights go off, and Roseau sees Fifi entertaining a table of guests in candlelight. The change of lighting makes Fifi suddenly look sinister to Roseau. She tells her companion: "It's just been sheer laziness to make the move and my room is rather charming. There's a big mimosa tree just outside the window. But I will leave" (*LB,* 184–185). The sinister forebodings are realized as a final row ends with the gigolo stabbing Fifi to death. Roseau cries for Fifi, looking at the mimosa tree she already thinks she will miss, but is left at the end of the story determined, and packing her bags. She no longer has a reason to stay in the ambiguous space of the hotel. As we have seen above, arrival to and departure from a place that becomes briefly evoked as lived space, are movements through which both Rhys and Barnes construct many of their stories. This pattern is supported by the new means available to women for movement and temporary residence in commercial spaces such as hotels. Importantly, however, in stories such as "La Grosse Fifi," the movement and lack of "solidity" associated with such spaces is not depicted as the opposite of hominess or belonging: it does not lead to a dehumanized, clean anonymity in urban spaces that would befit a futurist conception of modernity (cf. Zimmerman 2015, 90). Rather, hotel spaces, in spite of their impermanence, become momentarily intimate for their dwellers, whom we are led to imagine leaving traces of their experience in the spaces, and leave the hotel with traces of the space with them.

Readers are invited to become carriers of these traces: in enacting the descriptions of spaces, readers draw from the "traces" of past experiences in their embodied memory. On the other hand, going through the experience of reading, say, "La Grosse Fifi," readers' experiential background is bound to shift if only slightly, because the story-driven experiences leave behind "traces" of their own. Readers' experiences of the story are never completely independent of the textual material and merely a subjective product of their own past experiences, but an interaction, or, rather, tension between the two (Caracciolo 2014b, 49). In the fictional world, Roseau has been *moved*; her physical sensations and emotions have been affected by the hotel and by Fifi, and her moving to the next hotel is not a pure beginning, but something colored by the earlier events and encounters. Readers, too, have most likely been moved at least a tiny bit, perhaps to add some embodied sensitivity to the elements that make up the positive connotations of domesticity even to a seedy hotel (the feel of the "friendly sheet," the felt presence of another person, flowers and other beautiful things that are shown in connection with Fifi). There might even be some sociocultural understanding of the norms placed on female bodies

and conduct, the transgression of which in Fifi's character is regarded sympathetically from Roseau's point of view.[35] The story seems to be asking, whether readers can find some of the positive values associated with a home, as defined by Iris Marion Young (2005, 151–153): safety, individuation, privacy and preservation—in a place that is so clearly not a home in its normative, bourgeois sense, and in a fleeting moment of time.

The same question arises in connection with other stories and other semi-public spaces. Foucault calls hospitals and prisons "heterotopias of deviation": places for "individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm" (Foucault 1986, 25). Many of Rhys's stories are set in such places, and Rhys herself spent some time in both. They are spaces of involuntary, temporary habitation, and left behind as soon as possible, but this, paradoxically, likens them to the repulsive domestic spaces as described in the previous section. However, unlike houses and hotels, which seem to retain a wish of making their inhabitants remain within, the hospital and the prison appear as efficient institutions to deal with their "deviant" human contents and get rid of them. In "Let Them Call It Jazz" (1962), Selina, a Caribbean immigrant in London, lands in prison after having allegedly disturbed her neighbors. In a moment when her body is involved in the controlled practices of standing and walking in line, the space displays a gravitational effect that only seems to afford suicide, the only means of escape possible: "As we are going down I notice the railing very low on one side, very easy to jump, and a long way below there's the grey stone passage like it's waiting for you" (*TBL*, 58). The limitations of the prison space also offer a paradoxical sense of safety, one of the features commonly attached to domesticity: "When they clang the door on me I think, 'You shut me in, but you shut all those other dam' devils *out*. They can't reach me now" (*TBL*, 59). Nevertheless, she begins to long for liberty as she hears an inmate singing a prison song, and fantasizes: "One day I hear that song on trumpets and these walls will fall and rest" (*TBL*, 61).[36]

As Selina is let out to the "normal" world and begins to do better in life, she, too, seems to be carrying residue of the prison space at least in the form of the song, which she continues to sing and finally sells it to a music producer. Going through the story with Selina, the reader gains one perspective on what it is like to be in prison. Whether she is familiar with prisons or not, she will be able to imaginatively enact some of the feelings of being shut in, safely or suffocatingly, being controlled and supervised (walking in line), and the vertigo induced by the material features of the environment (a high place and a low railing). Selina's Martinique dialect marks her as an "other" in

35 Whether this will make readers more sympathetic is another question (see Section 4.1).

36 This is another recurring trope in Rhys: in the *Paris Review* interview, she is thinking of a title for her upcoming autobiography, and would like to call it *"And the Walls Came Tumbling Down,"* but her publisher resists; the unfinished autobiography was published posthumously as *Smile Please* in 1979 (Vreeland 1979, 233).

relation to the narrators/focalizers of many of Rhys's stories. Rhys mixes experiences that can be attributed to her biographical self (moving from the Caribbean islands to England, being imprisoned for disturbing neighbors, living precariously on the verge of prostitution) in the fictional body of a non-white woman. This might be seen as a problematic move, but it is based on the same dynamics as the enacted experientiality in reading: the interplay of "new" and "old" experiences produces another layer of narrative experience, and momentarily it is not so easy to say which are "my" experiences and which are the fictional "other's." The other affects or even "invades" the reading "I," if we follow Georges Poulet (1969, 59); the reader may, again, leave the story with a slightly altered experiential background.

Djuna Barnes takes the meanings of the prison as a safe space even further: she creates a character for whom prison means freedom. In "A Night in the Woods" (1917), Trenchard, a French immigrant in the United States, works with his wife as a baker and feels locked "in his little cellar" (*CS*, 221). He longs for "freedom of the out-of-doors," and a "communal freedom," which materializes paradoxically in a fantasy of the town jail (*CS*, 221). Trenchard's wish is granted when they are suspected of causing a death by poisoned bread. The prison cell they end up in is emphasized as "ordinary" rather than as "other": "like an ordinary room with a few rusty bars up at the windows" (*CS*, 224). Trenchard rejoices in the "freedom and the holiday we have been talking about" (Ibid.). The cell space even displays the characteristic openness of Barnes's houses in a bodily effect, as "a little puff of fresh air" blows against Trenchard's cheek from the window (*CS*, 226). After the couple realize that they are in danger of capital punishment, they manage, in another miraculous turn of events, to open the prison door and flee into the woods. They are slowed down by old age and ultimately betrayed by their dog, but before that, they enjoy "freedom," which materializes in the sensory description of the woods as they rest lying down, sensations that are described acutely in the present tense: "The smell of fresh sod and moss comes to their nostrils, the odor of a crushed flower, of a few bleeding berries. The sound in the air of leaves and wind seems good" (*CS*, 228). This is another example of Barnes's fiction that uses juxtapositions of indoor and outdoor perceptions and textures.

This story can be looked at along with "A Night among the Horses" (1918,[37] another story discussed at length later, (see Section 3.2.2), as a parallelization is suggested by the names of the two stories. In "A Night among the Horses," an "ostler" invited to join an upper-class

37 Revised version in *Spillway* (1962).

party in the house he works for, escapes and crawls through nearby undergrowth only to be stamped on by his horses. Both stories seem to suggest an opposition of natural and artificial, and the grim impossibility of combining freedom with either; it seems only to add an extra layer of irony and curiosity that the space from which they flee in "A Night in the Woods" is a prison. Both stories invite readers to go through in an embodied sense glimpses of a *sense* of freedom, even if they ironically posit it as doomed to failure. This tension is typical of the stories analyzed in this study. A reader of "A Night in the Woods" is left with multiple sensory imaginings: of the confinement of a prison cell and a gust of wind, the heat of a chase, the odors of "a crushed flower," "a few bleeding berries," and the "good" sound of "leaves and wind." Consequently, the story has potential for shifting the meanings of "freedom" and "confinement" in the reader's bodily and socio culturally constructed experience. Thus, the prison stories of both Rhys and Barnes destabilize the meanings connected with captivity and freedom, an effect enhanced in the connection with the domestic stories discussed in Section 2.1. A prison can be a place of light breeze, safety and freedom, whereas a home, recalling Irigaray's expression, can be "murderous" and suffocating, or open, unsafe and alienating. It also has its own temporality, a sense of time being slowed down by waiting, but perhaps also sped up by the fear of one's life going past while one is incarcerated. In Rhys's "Tigers Are Better-Looking" (1962), another story partly set in a jail, a writing on a cell wall says, "I died waiting" (*TBL*, 73).

A sense of time slowing down, waiting, efficiency and the color grey as combined with depression, death, and an occasional feeling of safety, are present in Rhys's hospital stories. The hospital in "Outside the Machine" (1960) shares characteristics with the prison, but also with the hotel of "La Grosse Fifi." It mixes the proximity of death and suicide with a longing for homey safety, experientially realized in the feel of the materiality of the space. A hospital room with fifteen beds is focalized by Inez: "The walls were painted grey. The windows were long but high up, so that you could see only the topmost branches of the trees in the grounds outside. Through the glass the sky had no colour" (*TBL*, 78). This is very different from the view of the Mimosa tree outside the hotel on the Riviera, but not that different from trees in the two later stories set in the English countryside discussed above. "The Machine" comes to signify both the grey and efficient hospital and the normativity reigning outside this heterotopia.

Time in the ward seems to pass slowly and cyclically, anchored in entrances and exits of doctors and nurses, periods of feeling better and feeling worse, turning slowly toward the better. Inez, too, is planning her exit, but it becomes clear that she has no place to go and no money. For her, the hospital is actually a safe haven, which she does not want to leave unless perhaps leaving the whole of the "machine" at the same time: she identifies with a suicidal patient judged by others. Finally, she is helped by an older lady who discreetly gives her a generous sum of money. Another exit follows, but this time the narrative makes clear

how the hospital time and space have left their mark on Inez. In the taxi, another liminal heterotopia, she finds herself wishing she was back in the hospital, "with the sheets drawn over her head" (recalling "La Grosse Fifi"[38]), "Because you can't die and come to life again for a few hundred francs" (*TBL,* 100). She feels like a ghost, like Teresa in "A Solid House," having been made so by both her time in the "heterotopia of deviation" *and* the machine of the "normal" world.[39]

The tactile sensations evoked by the mention of the sheets are a fitting parallel to these traces. The aural and the olfactory also enter the description in another story of giving birth, "Learning to Be a Mother," in *The Left Bank* (1927)*,* in which the arrival of the narrator at the clinic, by way of "interminable" stairs, is marked by a "turmoil" consisting of "mewing of babies, a warm smell of blankets, a woman moaning" (*LB,* 123). In this passage, as typical of Rhys's work, things appear more comforting than people. The loud noises coming from the human elements in the space appear as alarming, while the smell of blankets is "warm," promising a future warmth which the characters rarely expect from other people. If there is warmth and hominess in a hospital, it is to be found in the micro-space between the bedsheets.[40] A hospital has the potential to cater to some of the same human needs as a house; when one does not need the stability of identity, which according to Mulholland (2012) Rhys's characters would require, a combination of free movement complemented by moments of calm and safety could be found there. Young suggests that feminist scholars should not give up the concept of home, but instead study how safety, a support for identity, privacy and preservation, a caring relation to things could be attainable for more people outside the reach of a bourgeois dream home (Young 2005, 150–154). Rhys's stories show that ambiguities and instability are inherent in these values as well, but they also suggest that especially safety can be a lived reality even in a liminal, semi-public location as conventionally unhomely as a prison. As Thacker (2009, 193) observes, "Rhys's characters feel most at home in places of fleeting location on the borders of inside and outside spaces." Here it is important to note the formulation

38 In the *Paris Review* interview cited at the beginning of this section, Jean Rhys talks about a desire to let fate make one's decisions, manifest in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* by the protagonist's lying in bed and pulling the "covers" over her head; Rhys remembers that she used to do that as a child, because she was afraid of insects (Vreeland 1979, 228).

39 The motif of transforming hospital space is also present in *Good Morning, Midnight,* where Sasha recalls giving birth at a clinic in Paris, where she is wrapped tightly in bandages to allow her to leave with "no trace, no mark, nothing" (Rhys 1985, 380), which is echoed in her mind as her baby dies and she sees its little body tightly wrapped.

40 Interestingly, hospitals are also the only *surroundings* where Rhys's focal characters come close to family life including children: they are never portrayed with children older than babies, and never outside the situation of giving birth.

"feel at home": it is not only that Rhys's characters frequent these spaces, but they also, momentarily, feel safe and belong to them; they do not constantly grieve for a more stable place or identity. Mobility and instability support a kind of identity not bound to a single place and its preserved objects (cf. Young 2005, 151–153).

### 2.2.2. The Street and the Café

> Four walls make an argument, a tragedy; the street makes it only a momentary trouble. Here you can come and go. If you meet friends and disagree, you pay your bill and leave; if you "get on," you go from there to any harmony. At a café you can knit up the raveled sleave [sic] of time, or be as bitter as you like and owe it only to yourself. No house can claim so much. The house holds bitterness, the street does not.
>
> — Djuna Barnes: "Lament for the Left Bank"[41]

Djuna Barnes's "Lament" is a "miniature memoir" written upon commission in 1941 for *Town & Country,* a New York society magazine, and only recently republished. In it, Barnes reminisces about other expatriate writers and artists such as Gertrude Stein, Jean Cocteau, and James Joyce. However, the piece begins on a more personal level, as she eulogizes the street and the café (or the "bistro"), at the expense of "the house," which seems to insist on remaining a point of comparison even when the discussion moves toward increasingly public spaces. The beginning motivates the transportation to the space and time of memory, evoking the notion of the experiential trace left by the past: "Personally I would give all I have, except what I got from it, to be back in Paris again as it was, sitting at a bistro table with its iron legs in the sawdust from the escargot baskets, the cheap, badly-pressed cotton napkin coming off all over my best cloak […]." (Barnes 2015, 113). The description of the imagined visit goes on, rich in material detail, all the way to the more generalized homage to the spaces of the café and the street quoted above.

The "Lament" is in line with Wilson's observations on the "unhoused" characteristics of Barnes's fiction. The house appears as an unpleasantly sealed space; its four walls are capable of holding bitterness, argument and tragedy. This solidity of space and the permanence of time (conservation of bitterness), is contrasted with



41 1941; Barnes 2015, 112.

the "momentary" embodied by the café and the street, the progress of "raveling" and the futurity of the moment of "getting on" and going "from there to any harmony" that it affords. This seems to be another fitting summary of the reserve that both Barnes and Rhys carry for houses and dwelling spaces in general, including the more liminal spaces of hotels, prisons and hospitals discussed above. It also explains why they favor the very modern locations of cafés and streets; nevertheless, they are not without their own ambiguity.

In "Paprika Johnson," the liminal space between the domestic space of an apartment and the public space of the city allowed the character to extend her existence to the whole metropolis. In "Prize Ticket 177," this dynamic is further highlighted. Clochette Brin, a woman of thirty, lives with a disabled mother, who is only mentioned briefly as one element of the interior of her apartment. Rather than in the interior, the focus of interest and narration lies on the street. Below Clochette lives a younger woman, and a triangle drama ensues with the entrance of Doik, which is announced, significantly, as follows: "There had come to the street a young man" (*CS*, 87). Clochette becomes a guide for the newcomer, whose interests are also expressed by way of streets:

> He also aspired to a better knowledge of The Avenue and of fragile tea-cups and the well-waxed mustache. He had heard that on The Avenue love and life were ripe for the picking, and he had seen the bus framed in the cut running south of Twenty-third street. (*CS*, 88)

This passage situates the story geographically in lower Manhattan (more specific remarks locate it on Baxter Street in Little Italy). Meanwhile, the Avenue is a fantastical version of the street as it appears in Barnes's "Lament": you can "come and go" with the lightness of commercial transactions over fragile tea-cups and under well-waxed "mustaches" (whose location in any specific interior is of no importance).

The Avenue means a future of social mobility (Doik is hoping to move uptown), while the yearly big events on Baxter Street seem to have their roots in a different age in the past, in the carnival on the public square. There is a man coming from London to do tricks on stilts, and a lottery arranged for unmarried women, who are also paired with the streets by being called "the unattached women of the streets of the modern Babylon," (*CS*, 89). The focalization of this story, moves freely in the buildings and on the street, while the omniscient narrator remarks; Clochette is not the focalizer. After proceeding through characters leaning out of windows, having encounters in

the hallway, accompanied by the lights and sounds of Baxter Street, the story is finished with a characteristic twist of the plot as Clochette loses the single women's lottery to her downstairs neighbor, with Doik as the unexpected prize. She is, like Paprika Johnson, denied the possibility of domestic idyll, but the way the story has insisted on her and everyone else's life taking place on the street, the place of vivid impressions and futurity, the ending lacks a sense of tragedy. It is implied, as in the case of Paprika Johnson, that Clochette will lead a meaningful existence even without winning a husband in the lottery, and that the twist has been there more as an aesthetic source of amusement than as a tragic turn of events.

In Barnes' story, there is a playfulness to the streets, while in the fictional worlds of Rhys's stories that lightness is not always present. They highlight the power relations of the encounters, transactions, and transformations taking place in the street space. In "The Insect World" (1976), another wartime story, the insecurity of the street appears as a concrete problem and provides a sense of haunting, accompanied by a similar experience of modern transportation. In the London "Tube," Audrey, the focalizer, imagines people as large insects that "[get] in under your skin," inspired by a book she has been reading. She also has to walk along a stretch of street she detests, because of its recent history intermingled in its present ambience:

> It was one of those streets which are nearly always empty. It had been badly blitzed and Audrey was sure that it was haunted. Weeds and wild-looking flowers were growing over the skeleton houses, over the piles of rubble. There were front footsteps which looked as though they were hanging by a thread [...]. (*SIOL*, 133)

If Barnes constructs fantastic heterotopias of the street doubling as a mediaeval public square at the time of the carnival, where trouble is at worst momentary and light and the hegemonic order of the world is temporarily turned topsy-turvy, and uses her stories performatively as textual spaces with the same aim, Rhys could be seen as a proponent of a different realism. However, she also creates an embodiment of a fantasy taken to its extreme, namely one in which "the street becomes the room and the room becomes the street", a phenomenon ascribed to modernity by Walter Benjamin (1999, 406). Rhys's characters could be interpreted as *flâneuses* in the manner of Deborah Parsons (2000, 41–42). On the other hand, as Johnson and Moran (2015) suggest, the metaphor of haunting might be more fitting than the practice of *flânerie*, because of the experiential and ontological instability of time and place involved in the roaming activities of her characters, and the inherent problems of the restricted availability of the practice of *flânerie* for women, which was also pointed out by Parsons (Ibid.). In "The Insect World," haunting brings to the street a sense of unreality, but the descriptions of the concrete state of decay of the houses give a material, acute form to the abstract theme. Rhys's

characters may fantasize of walls cracking and falling, but the actual site of a street where this has occurred lacks the associations with freedom and futurity at least as focalized by Audrey.

In other stories, a sinister street may become the locus of a fleeting sympathetic encounter (see also Section 3.1). Especially some means of transportation emerge as positive heterotopias accompanied by a sense of continuing movement, at least if they imply social mobility. In "Till September Petronella," in a first-class train carriage with a ticket bought by the new acquaintance, Petronella states, in a line characteristic of Rhys's characters' brief feelings of happiness in a place, "This is very nice" (*TBL,* 29). In a taxi, she starts thinking of "home" again, imagining the emptiness left by her roommate. Instead, she goes to Hyde Park with another male acquaintance: "Yes, I want to look at the trees and not go back to the place where I live" (*TBL*, 31). This belonging in the garden, a "happy universalizing heterotopia" (Foucault 1986, 26), is brief and leads eventually to a return to the prison-like home, but it reveals the connection between hope, happiness, and public spaces, which is not found in homes.

As in Barnes's "Lament," cafés and restaurants appear as extensions of the street. They too are social places, offering "fragile tea-cups," bottles and liquor glasses, or wine and food, over which encounters can take place. Barnes's café spaces are not without ambiguity, however. One of the repeating patterns in stories such as "Cassation," "Dusie," and "Behind the Heart" (1993), is a random encounter in a café between the narrator or another protagonist, and an older lady, leading to a period of attachment in the lady's home. The beginning of "Behind the Heart," after providing spatio-temporal coordinates (it is autumn, in Paris), mingles the Paris café and its clientele with the surrounding streets and city, gluing them together with the help of the weather:

> For weeks, days and nights for weeks it had been raining. It was raining under the trees, and on the Avenues, and over the houses and along the Seine, so that the water seemed too wet; and the buttresses of churches and the eaves of buildings were weeping steadily; clinging to the angles, endlessly sliding down went the rain. People sat in cafés with their coat collars up, for with the rain the cold came; and everyone was talking everywhere about danger in the weather and in some cafés there was talk of politics and rain, and love and rain, and rain and ruined crops, and in one café a few people talked of Hess, this lady, Madame, of whom I am speaking. (*CS*, 447)

Writers can use these different types of focalizing to create different effects. For example, it is typical of Barnes's fiction to lead the reader toward the main character slowly, by way of other characters and especially material details surrounding him or her. The description moves from the general to the specific. The rain creates an ambience which embraces the entire city, equally touching its trees, streets, buttresses, eaves, and people, who come together as part of the city space in the cafés. The effect is like that in James Joyce's short story "The Dead" (1914), although inverse in its realization: in the latter, the focalization moves from the character to the whole country, bound by the falling snow. Barnes's zooming gesture seems to end up focusing on the individual, but she is not positioned as separate from the environment. Hess, the "lady" of the story, enters not as one of the people talking and being cold, but as one of the objects of talk, comparable to politics, love, ruined crops, and rain. The rain adds a sense of fate, a natural power beyond human influence, affecting and permeating everyone and everything like the "eternal drizzle" in Rhys's "Who Knows What's Up in the Attic?"

The panorama-like initial gaze tour of the narrator likens the passage to realist fiction (Thacker 2009, 32; Herman 2002, 280–281). It seems to be showing everything in the public spaces, before zooming in on the lived space of Hess's home, where a brief, passionate affair ensues between her and a young boy. The narrator, one of the many telling a story to an anonymous and silent "Madame," tells it as hearsay, but cites intimate conversations between Hess and the boy, as well as material detail ("she lay on her great white bed with many lace pillows and pillows of holy embroidery behind her, and I think, Madame, she was very happy and taken aback […]," *CS*, 449). The narrator thus appears more as the imaginer or inventor of the story than as one relating actual events. When Hess is feeling better after an illness, she and the boy go walking in the Luxembourg gardens. The rain, which has ceased, resumes and the boy decides he needs to leave and does so. The beginning of the story in the café, and the experientially evocative (even without a proxy experiencer in the fictional world, cf. Caracciolo 2014b, 173) drenching of its characters and settings with rain, combined with the ambiguous and mobile position and vision of the narrator produces a sense of movement and opening, as well as of dramatic or tragic moments narrated lightly, characteristic of Barnes's stories. The home features in this story as well, but rather as an "elsewhere" from the café and the wider expanse of space evoked at the beginning. Encounters happen on the street and in the café, and that is where stories about them are told: the rain, the café, and the Paris streets together "afford" the story. In this order of things, the home does not figure as a particularly important setting.

The actual space of the café is not portrayed in Barnes's stories as vividly as in "Lament" quoted above. Rhys, on the other hand, sets the action of entire stories in cafés. "In a Café" is an impressionistic

account of a moment marked by the entrance and exit of a singer in a café in the Latin Quarter of Paris. Readers are told that the place is "respectably full that evening" (*LB*, 49), and its ambience is described as follows:

> The peaceful atmosphere of the room conduced to quiet and philosophic conversations, the atmosphere of a place that always had been and always would be, the dark leather benches symbols of something perpetual and unchanging, the waiters, who were all old, ambling round with drinks or blotters, as if they had done nothing else since the beginnings of time and would be content so to do till the day of Judgment. (*LB*, 50)

Such description gives the café slightly different tones from Barnes's idyll of effortless mobility and encounters without bitterness. It is a conservative and "respectable" space, with contently unchanging elements, human and nonhuman. As such it offers something akin to one of the elements of home as characterized by Young, namely preservation: it is an environment where material things are cared for, also because of their history (cf. Young 2005, 140–145). Other stories, such as "Tout Montparnasse and a Lady," also show the café space as defined by a system of classes, the well-off dancing and others crouching in dark corners. Women glance at their mirrors at intervals, taking recourse in another heterotopia, and the freedom of eating and drinking is undermined by narrators reporting how many drinks the characters have already had, and what is the cost of a *fine à l'eau* or a cup of coffee.

Biographically considered, this may reflect the different relationships Rhys and Barnes seem to have had with urban space and especially with the city of Paris, where much of their lives probably has taken place in cafés. For Barnes, Paris itself remained a kind of heterotopia, a place of freedom away from home. Although she stayed for several periods of many years, she remained more or less within in the Anglo-American expatriate community and maintained her connection with New York. Rhys, on the other hand, was much more involved: she was married to a Frenchman and separated from him, gave birth, lost a child, and never received economic aid or recognition as a writer as Barnes did. She also had no other place to which she belonged as clearly as Barnes did to New York. Thus, Rhys may well have been inclined to see and depict the strain of power relations and conservative normativity very present even in a Paris café.

In fact, Barnes and Rhys may have had intrinsically different purposes for writing about cafés. Rhys's *Left Bank* short stories and

Barnes's "Lament" share many characteristics, among them the autobiographical/autofictional mode, yet Barnes's "Lament" is a eulogy to a past "golden age," and its purpose is to commemorate the expatriate community as a special encounter in a special place and time. Her short stories use the spaces of the city, including its streets and cafés, as enablers of performance: they are the material scenography that affords surprising turns of events and accidents, dramatic encounters and aesthetically fantastic descriptions, purposefully surrounded by an air of mystery. In this world, houses and apartments, even if shown in a state of decay, are still almost invariably luxurious and showcase a repertoire of things which takes them even beyond the bourgeois interior toward the aristocratic one. Rhys, on the other hand, depicts characters who struggle, encounters that may be happy but are never without an acute awareness of underlying power structures and the fleeting nature of happiness (see Section 4.1.1). What they share in their work, however, is the sense of movement and instability, which has the potential to imply freedom and challenges to reigning norms.

In these stories, the positioning of focal characters as fictional bodies to whom the reader can attribute enacted experiences invites the reader to experience movement, lightness, and uncertainty paired with occasional senses of stagnation and suffocation, and unexpected occasions of freedom and safety. In addition, the means of focalization preferred by Barnes where a ray of light or drop of rain are used as an aid for the reader's attention to travel from a single space to a wider expanse of scenery, creates other than human-centered options for the virtual presence of the storyworld for the reader. These experiences may occasion slight shifts in the embodied basis the reader has for higher-order interpretations and considerations of the meanings of private and public, stagnation and mobility. It is doubtful whether the public and semi-public spaces discussed here offer what Young suggests a home-like space should. In accordance with the researchers quoted in this chapter, the analyses show that both writers challenge the requirement of the home, and look for alternatives to present lived experiences of space and time, yet it is worth noticing that some of these characteristics, such as safety, preservation, and support for identity are present even in the public spaces and situations of mobility that Rhys's and Barnes's characters inhabit. In the spirit of mobility, both writers also often pay more attention to what characters are wearing than the spaces they inhabit. This characteristic will be discussed throughout this study, beginning with the following, final section of this chapter.

## 2.3 Containers and Clothes

> [O]nly I know how long I have been here. Nights and days and days and nights, hundreds of them slipping through my fingers. But that does not matter. Time has no meaning. But something you can touch and hold like my red dress, that has a meaning. Where is it?
>
> — Jean Rhys: *Wide Sargasso Sea*[42]

At the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Antoinette fears she has lost her red dress, the only thing left to remind her of a time and a place that are lost, her childhood and youth in Jamaica and Dominica. Her sense of time is questioned by Grace Poole, her nurse and guard, as she is locked in the attic of Thornfield Hall. Antoinette claims that the actual time, the one that has "a meaning," is that of her experience, manifesting in the tactile metaphor of hundreds of units "slipping through her fingers" (Rhys 1985, 571). The red dress has "meaning" in the fictional world because it can be touched and held. Clothes themselves are contained in trunks, suitcases, and cupboards, while their owner might be trapped in a comparable, narrow and completely unhomely environment such as the attic of Thornfield Hall. It is suggested here that spaces of containment for things and people, including shops and museums, trunks, and cupboards, as well as the minimal spaces of clothes, provide an alternative way of looking at space in the work of the two writers, beyond the dichotomy of private and public.

42 1966; Rhys 1985, 571.

### 2.3.1. Collections, Containers, and Plots

One factor that furthers the unhomeliness of Barnes's spaces is the way houses and rooms are portrayed as containers for collections of objects, comparable to museums.[43] As Wilson observes about *Nightwood*, comparing the spaces and language of the novel:

> Homes and sentences appear as collections of objects that accumulate meaning through the very fact of the collection. No character ever feels at home in these spaces, which alternately display the collection like a museum or invite performance like a vaudeville stage. (Wilson 2011, 431)

Wilson sees the careful collection of objects as a feature that does not support feeling "at home"; her view is different from the interpretation Young makes of the action of "preserving" things as conducive to exactly such a feeling (see also, Section 3.3). In Wilson's interpretation, the museum and the theatre support one another as spaces to be likened to Barnes's homes as well as sentences, undermining domesticity with their publicness.

In *Nightwood*, such interiors are found in the home of Nora and Robin, filled with found objects and personal memorabilia, Jenny Petherbridge's apartment, which contains memory objects important to *other people*, and Matthew O'Connor's boudoir with its assortment of feminine undergarments and medical instruments. Barnes uses similar topoi in her short fiction. Michaela Grobbel (2004) studies the connections between modernist texts with the practice and metaphor of "memory theaters" (collections of objects in a stage-like space to demonstrate and aid the workings of the memory). Memory theaters or "memory palaces" refer to imaginary constructions relying specifically on spatial metaphor, still used as memorizing techniques (Miller 2014, 482–483; Grobbel 2004, 3). Grobbel's view of remembrance as a performance in *Nightwood* is insightful, but her study does not dwell on the nature of memory theaters as collections of objects and the force of this connotation. According to T. I. Miller, the activity of listing things involved in the use of a memory palace technique challenges the notion of narrative space as perspectival perception (cf. Stanica 2014, 516). Miruna Stanica compares a container-type space with still-life paniting, in which "all is foreground" and "objects are pushed forward toward the viewer rather than receding toward a vanishing point" (Ibid., 518). Space emerges as a container, where the three-dimensional relations of things seen from a single point of view are not present. It could be remarked that what containers contain necessarily has experiential importance, and thus a certain amount



43 The actual space of a museum does not appear anywhere in her work

of perspective in the form of a fictional experiencer is needed, be it a character or another kind of focal solution creating an imaginary experiencing body. However, the metaphors of memory palace and container remain useful for the study of Barnes's fiction, as they reveal how the description of singular things contributes to an impression of space as ambiguous, fleeting and without a totalizing vision.

Catalogues and inventories as means of expression can produce a sense of the aperspectival space of a container. One example of such space is the pawnshop run by Lydia Passova in "Mother" (1920). She deals in jewelry and uses even her body as a site of displaying precious things, wearing "coral in her ears, a coral necklace, and many coral finger rings" (*CS*, 301). The description of her shop space is inventory-like:

> She dealt, in most part, in cameos, garnets, and a great many inlaid bracelets and cuff-links. There were a few watches, however, and silver vessels and fishing tackle and faded slippers—and when, at night, she lit the lamp, these and the trays of precious and semi-precious stones, and the little ivory crucifixes, one on either side of the window, seemed to be leading a swift furtive life of their own, conscious of the slow pacing woman who was known to the street as Lydia Passova. (*CS*, 301–302)

The reader may first notice that the listing of things does not totally eliminate perspective. The inclusion of Lydia lighting a lamp introduces her as someone observing the things, and thus the list of material things works to point the way toward the human element in the space, yet again, it is also the light that directs the attention. However, this subject, which we might assume the space to support, is slightly undermined by the personifying intrusion of "the street," the entity to which Lydia is known. Thus, the passage is *both* an introduction of Lydia's perspective as a subject moving in space, and the beginnings of a list of nonhuman elements, which takes the point of view further away from Lydia: the "conscious" and "knowing" elements of the passage are the street and the things contained in the interior; they actually become the focalizers of the passage.[44] The human subject is not placed in the interior but on the street, and the personification suggests that there are other agencies as interesting as Lydia's; the effect of the whole is aperspectival, even if it does evoke several kinds of experience.

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44 When the instance of metonymy is combined with the "life" and "consciousness" of the things inside the pawnshop, the passage suggests a stronger animation of the street as well.

Miruna Stanica suggests that things in a fictional container are often used to "figure their human owner," like a house would be, but that they work to enable the owner's mobility instead of providing shelter, and they foreground temporality instead of spatiality. They "do not create a character-supporting setting, extending character in space, but rather enable the continuing adventures of the protagonist, extending his existence in time" (Stanica 2014, 522). In Barnes's fiction, the logic of the inventory, be it in a shop or in a home, indeed does not seem to provide shelter or support for the characters. Some of the spaces and things can be seen as affording movement, prolonged existence and memory, but some are also restricting, weighing one down, not quite amounting to a container in the early modern sense as elaborated by Stanica, and maintaining the preference on the spatial, while definitely not producing the homely features discussed above, as listed by Young. The memory theater, on the other hand, is a fitting metaphor for these fictional spaces, but even this form becomes defamiliarized.

In "A Duel without Seconds" (1929) the interior could be seen as a dysfunctional memory palace. The typically aristocratic setting shows Baron and Baroness Otterly-Hansclever, an elderly couple alienated from their friends and from one another, in a silent drama played out through the space and its material things. They are shown having dinner, "each immured in a lonely little canopy of light flung by the candles at either end of the long table" (*CS*, 412). This, too, seems to be a haunted space populated by ghosts of the past and personified things:

> Silent and preoccupied they both were, while between them the long, hard expanse of mahogany mocked them with a false gaiety of silver and glass and with shadows of candlelight that danced along its bland surface like ghosts of the company whose laughter it once had known. There was silence too, in the room that brooded darkly over the lonely couple—silence heavy and complete save for the whisper of the butler's feet as he moved pallidly in the dimness beyond the high, brocaded chairs. But to the Baroness the very silence was loud with echoes of the past [...]. (Ibid.)

The interior and its things are described meticulously, which gives them a quality of "realness," while the unreal, in the form of haunting "echoes of the past," is present as well. At the end the focalization rests on the Baroness, but earlier it seems to travel around the room, following a flickering light. The power of the illusion of the phantom guests is made visible in an embodied manner in that the Baroness is depicted turning her head toward the habitual places of habitual guests, marked by the material detail.

Little by little, the story reveals the peculiar material circumstances of the couple's predicament (by which the Baron, "liv[ing] entirely in

the past," seems unaffected), which has cost them their wealth and friends. First, one of their guests claims to have been robbed:

> [...] not only of her mother's emerald pendant but of her father's father's time-piece, as big as a turnip and wound with a key in the shape of a spade, which she valued not so much because it was her grandfather's as because it was worth a thousand British pounds, its equivalent in dollars, its twin in marks, and its replica in lire. (*CS*, 415)

The lengthy description of the functioning of the thing and its value in different currencies appears as comically out of place in such lament. It emphasizes the watch as an exhibition piece, whose exact value and properties are more important than personal attachment. The implications of collection are again paired with theatricality, visible in the narrator's comment in parentheses before the lament of the guest: "(the acoustics of the Baron's mansion being peculiarly perfect for rendering anguish)" (Ibid.). With the theft, suspicion enters, "like an evil fog in that brilliant room" (*CS*, 416). The things are not found, and each of the couple's following parties is marked by the disappearance of another valuable thing. No offender is discovered, and guests begin to decline their invitations. The couple themselves are also said to be robbed of some of their own precious things. Thus, the space is emptied of memory-supporting things, including visitors, but the memories remain, haunting. The Baroness decides to take absurd revenge in a duel, killing herself in the absence of an opponent. For this purpose, another valuable thing is needed: "She knew how she would die, knew that it would be by her own pistol which her mother had given her on her wedding day 'in case of burglars'. A handle encrusted in diamonds it had, and a long, gleaming barre" (*CS*, 418). The pistol has been locked away in a secret drawer, and over the years the Baroness has only "looked at it fondly and [...] locked it away again" (*CS*, 418). A final twist ends the story: the pistol, too, is gone.

The things which go missing in the mansion are related to memory, not only through obvious allusions to time as the "time-piece," but also through the links to their owners' family history that almost all of them have in common. The story suggests a sense of fate dictated beyond generations especially in the pistol given by the mother, but the pistol becomes instead a means of a parody of the inevitability of the tragic narrative form. The purpose of the pistol as "Chekhov's gun," an object whose narrative foregrounding means its inevitable centrality in the action to come, becomes thwarted. The story does not actually call for speculation on the identity of the thief; it seems to be more important to the atmosphere of mystery constructed with

the help of the things and their capacity to bring several layers of time simultaneously within the house, and the way they are used to bring about narrative gestures. The "haunting" of the house results in things disappearing, but is also brought about by things, that in both their absence and presence create memories, ambiences, and actions, and bring about the ruin of the couple. The absent pistol is one of the things that hs value as an aesthetic part of the collection, for the couple as well as the narrative. The Baroness would like to use it as an efficient scenographic prop: "to die magnificently, by candlelight, the diamonds in her pistol flashing a last challenge to the heartless world" (*CS*, 419). The thing, however, denies the Baroness and the story this moment of theatrical unravelling, because it is absent when the Baroness would make it "serve" (*CS*, 418).

The drawer that has housed the pistol is a micro-space within the fictional space. Such containers appear as material, spatial metaphors for the unhomely interior spaces inhabited by characters, being simultaneously stuffy and open (enough to make the pistol disappear, for instance). I suggest that a reader's experiences produced by the embodied enactment that the text invites in relation to characters, their bodies as contained and freed by spaces, are also evoked by the "bodies" of the things. The motif of containment takes a human form in a reader's experience, but it can also metaphorically be expressed in the form of nonhuman things such as the pistol and this metaphor also rests on embodiment and materiality.

The line between human and nonhuman entities as contained is blurred also in "A Perfect Murder," another story with surprising turns and morbid motifs. Professor Anatol Profax, a successful linguist, encounters a mysterious woman, whom he is unable to "place" based on her speech (*CS*, 445), in spite of his experience as a dialectologist. He takes her home, and with sudden dedication slits her throat with a pen-knife. He then stuffs her body inside a trunk, not lamenting his deed except for the way it has robbed him of the "great secret" of her origin (Ibid.). Later he opens the trunk and notices that she is no longer there. Riding frantically around in the city, he sees her in an adjacent cab, that subsequently disappears in the traffic. The story refers intertextually to Shaw's Pygmalion, motifs in Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) with its pursuit of a stranger, and "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) with the young woman who escapes from a coffin. However, in Barnes's story, no natural (even if horrifying) explanation, like the young girl's premature burial in Poe's story, is given. The disappearance of the woman becomes a textual gesture, part of the play of metaphors of space and time used in a performative way: her characters and things, refuse to be "placed," in the sense of being contained in definite spaces. They also refuse to provide readers with a clearly framed identity or explainable behavior, as well as moments of recognition or epiphany they might have prepared for when reading a short story. The experiential parallelization of people and things as contained works toward the goal of recalcitrance.

Wilson (2011, 431) notes that Barnes's *Nightwood* challenges the Jamesian idea of the novel as a house, and approaches postmodernist literary problematics, not only because of its settings and subject-matter, but by virtue of its structure. Seeing the novel as a house makes it a static representation of a totality that is more or less contained between its beginning and ending, something that Virginia Woolf, in "Modern Fiction," also writes against, using spatial metaphors. Additionally, using spatial metaphors for works of fiction foregrounds the aspect of immersion into a fictional world at the expense of the capacity for simultaneous real-world experience and self-reflection (Polvinen 2016, 20). By definition, the short story is a more open format that can invite both intense emotional and bodily engagement and distanced reflection within a relatively short temporal frame. Barnes's stories definitely resist being compared to any kind of dwelling space.

A readier metaphor, extending beyond the specific format of the memory theater, could be found in the trunks and drawers discussed above. They contain a variety of essential elements that are brought together to create an effect and perhaps to induce a sense of wonder and puzzlement, rarely at least immediately translatable to an affective closure even in forms found in such modern stories as James Joyce's or Anton Chekhov's; both are cited by Woolf in "Modern Fiction" as authors who let the ambiguities of life manifest itself instead of building a wind-proof house. A drawer may contain a muddle of things, significant and superfluous in themselves, with no clear relation to one another or to the perspective of the observer. The combination itself becomes significant as does the potential for agency, as will be observed in more detail in Section 3.4. Things in such collections are used to support the temporality of plot, as Stanica suggests, but often result in foregrounding the collection itself, and thereby spatiality over temporality.

### 2.3.2. Moments of Being within Clothes

In Rhys's novels and stories, clothes and especially dresses have a special role. Here it is important to discern two functions for clothes that also appear in Barnes's work. Firstly, they have a relationship to time: especially in Rhys, they are used as "aide-memoires" (Joannou 2012, 457), that mark a period in a character's past, and bring it back through an act of either voluntary or involuntary memory. Secondly, clothes are things that people wear closest to the skin; they create a

space of their own, offering a combination of mobility and stability that the domestic spaces in the stories fail to provide.

In Rhys's stories, there are shop interiors that clearly function chiefly as containers for clothes. In novels such as *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Good Morning, Midnight*, there are crucial scenes in which characters use the space of a clothing store to effect or pursue a moment of transformation, that leads to a better future, which already seems to become actual in the material elements contained by the store. In *Voyage in the Dark,* Anna Morgan's lover buys her a dress, and she rejoices: "Out of this warm room that smells of fur I'll go to all the lovely places I've ever dreamt of" (Rhys 1985, 16). Mulholland (2012, 449) views the shop as another threshold area where transformation takes place, but not the one the character dreams of: Anna is "transformed into a commodity that Walter has purchased" (Ibid.). This view is justified, but as the analyses here will continue to show, the lived experience that readers are invited to feel evoked in such moments in the narratives requires realizing the *sense* of transformation produced in the moment that is interpretable as that of commodification.

Stanica (2014, 518–519) observes that a description built around a container of things, rather than a space where the positioning of things is crucial, "refuses to give vision the dominant role." In general, other senses are also present in spatial description, but the container allows for a readier attention to experience related to other senses. The forms of description that Rhys uses do not appear as clearly perspectival, visual totalities, but neither do they have such catalogue-like properties as can be seen in Barnes's fiction. This is clear in another shop interior experienced and described from the point of view of another Anna, in the short story "Mannequin" (1927). On her first day working as a model in a Paris fashion boutique, she is overwhelmed by the shop's glamorous public spaces and behind it, the "countless puzzling corridors and staircases, a rabbit warren and a labyrinth" (*LB*, 60), where she orients herself toward the lunch hall with the help of "the smell of food—almost visible, it was so cloud-like and heavy" (*LB*, 63). During this body tour, the reader never has a very clear idea of the details of the interior, but rather glimpses certain aspects by vision, hearing, smell and touch, relevant in themselves, but not necessarily in relation to one another in such a way as to convey a general sense of three-dimensional space or a cognitive map. The story underlines the function of the shop as a containing space for clothes and people, the saleswomen, seamstresses and models. Anna comments on a "depressing" dressing room as "a very inadequate conservatory for these human flowers" (*LB*, 61; see Section 5.1). Thus, the description retains Anna's perspective as opposed to an aperspectival catalogue; however, the sense of a container is present in the way different impressions fill the fictional space and the textual space of the story without forming a clear continuum or hierarchy.

The space of the dress shop appears in a miniature form in trunks and cupboards, even to the point of rendering these, too, commercial

spaces. In "Who Knows What's up in the Attic?" there is one more character who was not introduced in the discussion of the story at the beginning of this chapter. Mr. Singh is a travelling salesman, who sells "blouses, scarves and underclothes" (*SIOL*, 148). He visits the writer-focalizer often, after she has bought "something gaudy and useless" in a lonely and bored moment (Ibid.). When Jan arrives, the reader at first thinks it is Mr. Singh, after which he is not mentioned in the story until its very end. When Jan has left, there is a cut marked by five periods signifying a new part in the narrative, which begins with Mr. Singh's unexpected entry through the open door. The writer is "delighted" to see him ("Any port in a storm," she comments; *SIOL*, 156). Mr. Singh produces an unspecified garment, advertising it: "Beautiful stuff, beautiful. Feel it" (Ibid.). She wants to look closer at an "orange-coloured thing," a short nightgown, and deems it pretty, which seems to surprise the salesman. She buys it and a similar gown in black. Without trying to sell anything else, he shuts his suitcase and leaves. Walking him out, she feels the weather turning colder, closes and locks the door to mark the end of the story.

Suitcases are minor, non-domestic spaces that enable their carriers' movement instead of limiting it. We have encountered some of Rhys's suitcase-bearing characters in earlier analyses of this chapter, like Selina in "Let Them Call It Jazz," and Petronella "Till September Petronella"; both demonstrate the ambiguity hidden in the allegedly free movement of modernity, and the difficulty of conceiving of a *flâneuse* (cf. Parsons 2000). Their suitcases contain clothes, but clothes themselves make another "portable" space which is even more central in Rhys's fiction. In "Who Knows What's up in the Attic?" we do not see the writer wear and feel the dresses, but in others, a *sense* of change and possibility in the future, and even happiness in the present, is materialized in this very act, as at the end of "Mannequin," where Anna leaves the shop feeling "happy in her beautifully cut tailor-made and a beret" (*LB*, 69).

The writer has been dreaming of another place, while denying herself the possibility of leaving; the end of the story is an ambiguous fictional-textual gesture that provides simultaneously a sense of liberation and confinement, lightness combined with darkness and heaviness. Mr. Singh's suitcase is a promise of the other place, a tiny heterotopia loaded with the potential of difference and transformation, akin to the dress shop visited by Anna in *Voyage in the Dark*. His possibly Indian roots add to the sense of his bringing in his suitcase a souvenir of an unspecified, longed-for place somewhere in the south, so often present in Rhys's fiction. There is, however, also the shutting of the suitcase and the door, and an irony in a possibility of happiness having been replaced by a substitute, buying nightgowns,

indulging in what Mulholland calls "illusion" (2012, 450). Buying a dress can indeed be seen as a rite of transformation, yet it does not do justice to the concept of rite to dismiss its outcome as simply illusory. In their material presence in the fictional world, highlighted by the allusions to their tactile "feel," the dresses are everything but illusion, as demonstrated by the quotation from *Wide Sargasso Sea* at the beginning of this section. On the contrary, they can be touched and held, as Antoinette describes, are materially real and very close to the feeling body, and therefore "meaningful" in a basic, affective way. For the reader, of course, everything happening in the fictional world is an "illusion," but the material things shown to be touched and held by the characters contribute to making them "real," in the sense of inviting an enactment in the body of the real reader, drawing on his or her real past experiences.

The sensory imaginings invited by the story bring a tangibility to the process of interpretation using "higher-order" cognitive reasoning and cultural understanding. This is another case where attention to the material and bodily changes the interpretation in the cultural sense: the illusion of happiness and the transformation into commodity that are pointed out by Mulholland become something more ambiguous. In buying the gowns, the writer buys an accessible, third version of the "other place," something beautiful and soft to be contained within even if she does not leave her house. We might ask, what would be the "real," non-illusory change in the life of the writer in "Who Knows What's Up in the Attic?", and could it be achieved equally well through feeling good contained in one's clothes as through escaping the house, the large container of a life which feels unhomely? In this story, the closeness of contact is not only with fabric, but with another human being, as Mr. Singh appears as a "port in a storm." Even though this encounter is brief and colored by a commercial transaction, its ambiguity is crucial to how the story ends, combining a sense of happiness and sharing with the tragic sense of its fleetingness. The character of the writer should be seen as parallel to the clothes she has bought, but not so much as a commodity as someone/something shut within an unhomely space.

To return to "A Solid House," the story discussed at the very beginning of this chapter, the unhomely house could also be looked at through the metaphors of the container and collection, with its multiple rooms filled with antique furniture and curious objects. The reader can grasp the feel of the things contained in the house, not so much the feel of the house itself. This space, too, contains other containers to strengthen the appeal of the metaphor, including a cupboard full of dresses and other items of clothing. The small space of the cupboard is similar to Mr. Singh's suitcase in that the dresses are for sale: Miss Spearman is practicing second-hand trade as a "sideline" (*TBL*, 117). She opens the door of the cupboard to cheer Teresa up, opening a commercial space within the domestic one. She offers Teresa a felt hat with a veil and a green dress once owned by a "very smart woman." Teresa likes neither, but is persuaded to try on

the green "hideous thing" (*TBL*, 118); this time the dress does not even seem to offer hope of transformation. Instead, she recognizes in the cupboard her own black dress she has brought to be sold, "hanging next to a shapeless purple coat," and compares it to a "self": "A cast-off self, it stared back so forlornly, so threateningly that she turned her eyes away" (Ibid.).[45]

Thus, this story uses the schema of containment to introduce ambiguity in space, but with a more tragic tone than the previous one. The cupboard is not so much a space of dreams and futurity as a failed heterotopia; it promises dreams and comfort at low prices (both stories cite some exact prices in pounds), but also becomes part of a hegemonic order of consumerism, a commercial space. For Teresa, the cupboard is placed simply as parallel to the unhomely space she inhabits. Her old dress, which Miss Spearman has difficulties in selling ("Black's too depressing," Ibid.), appears as a body shut in another "inadequate conservatory," in the company of "hideous things." Its material detail is not described, either; the only reference is to its color, which points toward death, night and sleep, the "ways out" that Teresa seems to be able to conceive of for herself in her state of anxiety, which may for some people experientially resemble being shut in a cupboard. This experientiality is what makes the dress comprehensible as a metaphorical/metonymical, parallel element to Teresa, bringing a lived dimension to the interpretation of the symbolism of its color or its commodity function.

In the same way as the cupboard in "A Solid House," the micro-spaces of dresses are used as an embodied metaphor to convey a sense of uncomfortable situations: the badly fitting green dress and the black one shut inside the cupboard. In "Sleep It off Lady," another story of unwilling confinement in a space, Miss Verney, just before seeing the rat in the shed, observes that this space haunts her dreams. She describes one:

> One night she was standing looking at it changing its shape and becoming a very smart, shiny, dark blue coffin picked out in white. It reminded her of a dress she had once worn. A voice behind her said: "That's the laundry."
>
> "Then oughtn't I to put it away?"
>
> said Miss Verney in her dream.
>
> "Not just yet. Soon," said the voice so loudly that she woke up. (*SIOL*, 162)

45 A very similar instance of fellow-feeling for clothes in a cupboard is found in an earlier story, "Illusion"; this is more thoroughly discussed in Section 4.1.

A dress, a potential embodiment of mobility and possibility, becomes fused with a coffin, the definitive image of being shut in. The allusion to "the laundry" adds a sense of surrealism and comedy appropriate for a dream, but it also points again toward the importance of clothes. As metaphorical, yet lived things and spaces, they can experientially induce suffocation, claustrophobia and even death, as well as a promise and even the actualization of a better life. The way clothes are worn close to the body, yet make a space separate from it, makes them more ready means of expression for these stories than larger spaces would be. Like Barnes's, Rhys's stories combine impressions of various elements, which could liken them as textual spaces to small containers instead of houses or rooms. However, their focus on the intimate feel of these impressions, even when portrayed by very minimalist means, might make a dress an even more fitting comparison. The stories are depictions of "moments of being" with a strong "what-it-is-like" dimension, which their reader, by virtue of embodied enactment and virtual projection, is invited to try on and live with for their brief duration, sharing the airiness of hope and happiness as well as the uncomfortable, pressing anxiety and disillusionment.

This can be seen as a modernist mode of striving toward an accurate rendering of perception end experience, in its multisensory and often fragmented and confused form. In the stories discussed in this chapter, the experiences of space and of the material things contained in it are used as material reminders of both the past and the fluctuating passage of time, as well as pointers toward a different future, which is simultaneously present as a heterotopia. The stories' thematic preferences for public over private, mobility over stability, the presence of multiple levels of time over linearity, together with the means of expression resting on the experienced materiality of things, shows space and time as permeated by the conflict and ambiguity that characterize the modern sociocultural context of the stories. The stories introduce material forms that afford containment, but paradoxically also transgression and mobility. The same applies to the literary form of the stories. Caroline Levine argues that in literary fiction, the social implications of closure can be set in fruitful conflict with the temporal form of reading, which affords continuation (Levine 2015, 40). However, even when examining texts as experientially spatial entities, like containers, they afford open-endedness in the relations and combinations of the elements they contain. The short story form, as it is used by Rhys and Barnes, can be a stage of playing out a conflict in narrative form: it refuses to be a house, or even a room, but arranges itself rather as a collection of impressions a reader can go through in a multisensory manner, while being capable of active higher-order reflection; it is similar to wearing a dress or fumbling through the contents of a drawer or a suitcase.

In Barnes's and Rhys's spaces, public and domestic ones, and everything in between, individual objects come to the fore in a way that challenges the idea of perspective and thereby of a stable experiencing identity, adding a fleeting and sometimes ghostly characteristic to instances that may still invite an acute enactment of feeling on the part of the reader. This process can be seen as crucial for grasping, to use another embodied metaphor, the culturally coded meanings of the story. However, the analyses suggest that this projection may also be a feature that transgresses the boundaries of the human body, if the focalization structure invites a different kind of projection involving, for instance, light functioning as a proxy for vision or a thing suggesting the enactment of containment. Further following Caracciolo, I suggest that these experiences also feed back into the reader's experiential background, not only involving basic sensorimotor experience, but also sociocultural understanding: they potentially affect the ways readers can think about the gendered dimensions of space, time, home, movement, the private and the public, often uncoupling such homely features as safety, individuation and preservation from domestic spaces. Attention to this interplay of the embodied and the cultural often suggests some modifications to earlier interpretations made of these stories, and shows that they are grounded in materialities of lived bodies and "lived things."

# The Agency of Things

# 3 The Agency of Things

The previous chapter has shown that material things are engaged in the world-making and meaning-making of the texts as experiential anchors of time and space. The hypothesis of this study remains that the agency of Barnes's and Rhys's things is a broad phenomenon beyond their functionalism as literary devices, hints of which were already seen in the instances of animation discussed in the previous chapter. Reading these texts is affected by a sense of material, nonhuman, inanimate things that have agency in their own right, comparable if not similar to that of the human characters. From this claim it follows that things also have a special role in the affective involvement the texts invite, and ultimately, in the way they construct meaning and invite interpretation or sense-making. However, for the claim itself to make sense, it needs to be clarified: what kind of agency can dresses, teacups, paintings, bits of lace, postcards, and books have; how should it be discussed when reading modernist fiction, and the stories of Jean Rhys and Djuna Barnes in particular?

Questions of nonhuman agency have been raised in recent discussions around actor-network theory, thing theory, as well as different approaches labelled under posthumanism and new materialism. However, the agency of things in the guise of the negotiation of the boundary between subjects and objects was also a pressing issue at the time when Barnes and Rhys were writing their short fiction. Many of these concerns were discussed under the rubric of fetishism. This chapter begins with discussions of forms of animism and magical thinking in Rhys's stories, and Barnes's brand of fetishism. The new materialist point of view into the agency of things, as well as a focus on embodiment and affectivity that define this study, lead to different readings of fetishism, too. Jean Rhys's characters are drawn by commodity fetishes and animistic thinking, in which a dress has the power to change lives, while hats, rooms, and parks can be imagined to express opinions. When following the promise of consumer goods, human characters and their bodies risk being commodified, as has already been pointed out in the analysis of the earlier chapter, yet, contrary to a tradition in Rhys studies, they are not made passive or victims by their reliance on and parallelization with things, but often display a sense of agency enhanced by the things. In Barnes's case, a psychoanalytically oriented reading might identify a fetish in an orthodox manner with the disavowal of *lack,* an absence that is filled by the fetish object. Barnes's texts, while revealing absence and longing, also evoke a sense of abundance beyond the economy of lack and its applications to female characters.

By focusing attention on the multiple forms of agency that can be identified by looking at the evoked materiality of the fictional things and their performative power as fetishes, the first two sections of this chapter bring the discussion of fetishism closer to the anthropological notion of the *talisman*, the potential of which has already been pointed out by feminist scholars of fetishism. However, a discussion of fetish objects as "lived things" has been missing: how does the lived experience of a fetishized object as a material thing contribute to a sense of its powers? The latter two sections explore newer conceptions of agency as distributed and affective. In Section 3.3, I examine practices and senses of community, belonging and agency brought about jointly by things and human characters in Rhys's stories, while Section 3.4 explores agency in Barnes's work as distributed in affective assemblages of thing-like characters and lively things. Both these approaches, I claim, show how Rhys's and Barnes's texts produce an array of ways of being-with-things in which the things take an active part. Their literary techniques exemplify the potential for embodied involvement of readers not just with characters, but also with allegedly inanimate things. I hope that this is a contribution to a vein of discussion on what separates humans from things, or connects them.

# 3.1 Mannequins, Spirits, and Magic Fashion: Animism and Fetishism in The Left Bank

> Things are more powerful than people.
>
> — Jean Rhys, "The Sound of the River"[46]

The notion of magic as it is presently understood embodies the idea of something not legitimate within a rational, scientific system of thought (During 2002, 20). Defining something as magical explains it as unexplainable within a scientific world view, either as illusory or as attributable to supernatural powers, depending on the beliefs of the speaker. This section examines Rhys's use of magical themes and motifs related to the inherent powers of things and the animation of what is supposedly inanimate, and sets these in the literary context of the modernist, avant-garde movements that cultivated different forms of magical thinking in vogue in Paris at the time of completion of *The Left Bank* (1927). Another contextual framework of consequence arises from Rhys's roots in Dominica in the British Antilles. Such contextually conscious research has been undertaken already on many occasions, but the focus on material things and embodiment has not been explicitly undertaken in this connection.

Several researchers have pointed out that magical thinking was popular in the context of modernism and modernity (see, for instance, During 2002; Landy & Saler 2009; Wilson 2013). Tyrus Miller (1999, 42–43) considers the "anthropomorphic 'animation' of the object world" as part of the mimetic practices that were seen as symptoms of the depersonalization of life in the modern society. The phenomenon is attributed to both the revival (and invention) of some superstitious practices that gained considerable popularity, and the metaphorical and ironical adaptation of magical thinking to the use of art and theory.[47] In the European modernist intellectual climate of the era, the notion of the fetish was quite prominent, not only because of a newly-found interest in *primitivism* and the arts and cultures of (former)

46 1966; *Tigers Are Better-Looking*, p. 130.

47 In the context of art, a post-rationalist tendency of "re-enchantment" can be observed from the 18th century gothic revival onwards (*see* Paige 2009, 160). I will attempt to clarify the special features of early 20th century magical thinking in the course of this section.

colonies, but thanks to the influence of the two thinkers with arguably the most effect on the 20th century, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud.

The core of Marx's idea of commodity fetishism is that the production of value of a commodity is veiled in mystery, arising not only from work and material qualities, but also from the magical commodity character of the thing. In an oft-cited passage, Marx uses an image of a table that as a commodity becomes a "transcendent" thing full of "metaphysical subtleties" that "evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than 'table-turning' ever was" (Marx 2001, 75). The fetish object seems to think and act for itself and is compared to "table-turning," a type of spiritualist séance in which the spirits of the dead are summoned and eventually cause a table to move. Commodities-as-fetishes are agents as far as they form relations among themselves and come to define human social relations; they also have their way of "talking" to the human members of the society, luring them to consume. In Freud's account, on the other hand, the fetish is a product of castration anxiety, "a substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in," a sign of the simultaneous disavowal and acceptance of this (imaginary) lack (Freud 1977, 352). The eroticized fetish object becomes animated in a process of metonymy, comparable to magical thinking.

Both uses of the notion of fetish[48] hark back to the introduction of the term in an anthropological context, but also differ from it (Apter 1991, 43). In its early definition, an inanimate, artificial object is in a metonymical relation to a person, and by this relation assumes part of the living creature's power, like a voodoo doll, a lock of hair, or a piece of clothing that once belonged to someone (Wilson 2013, 15). Animism, then, is a broader term for the belief in the vitality of inanimate things and nature (Pietz 1993, 131–132). The religious, animistic notion of fetish as a magic talisman is defined by a peculiar, literal version of a representative relation in which something also *is* what it represents: a statue of a deity is also the deity. The psychoanalytical version rather resembles the Saussurean relation between signifier and signified, in which the latter stands in place of the former's absence. In the modern context, the pairing of woman with absence or lack, combined with Marxist thinking of the reification of human relations and the lure of commodity fetishes, risks making fetishism something of a cage for women: a situation in which a woman is not

48 The term derives from the Portuguese *feitiço*, meaning both "charm, sorcery" and "made by art, artificial, skilfully contrived"; it was originally used to refer to "any of the objects used by the indigenous peoples of the Guinea coast and the *neighbouring* regions as amulets or means of enchantment, or regarded by them with superstitious dread" (OED: 'fetish'). Religious objects are also referred to in the West African context as "Vodun objects" or "Vodun divinities," and some traditions avoid using the term 'fetish' because of the ballast added to it by Western theories (*Encyclopedia of African Religion* 2009, 266). The sexual meanings of the term were only added by its use in Freudian psychoanalysis.

only doomed to fall short of an ideal, but also victimized as both a subject and an object of consumption (Apter 1991, 1993; Schor 1995).

By examining these contextual features and Rhys's employment of different versions of magical thinking and fetishism, I aim to point out not only some influences and intertexts, but also the ways in which her writing challenges its context and provides a different point of view to magical thinking and practices in relation to things. Furthermore, I wish to show how Rhys's stories expose the ambiguity inherent in the notion of fetishism to the effect of challenging our ways of reading gendered subject/object positions.[49] The mannequin both as a motif and as a character points toward both the fetishized female body (with its detachable parts) and the magical lure of commodities, and it is animated in a way that participates in, but is still is not completely reducible to, the restraining order of Freudian-Marxist fetishism; *The Left Bank* treats magical practices and superstitions with subtle irony, and the animistic beliefs and the embodied livedness hovering in their background might actually provide a way out of the sexualized commodity fetishism.

### 3.1.1. Mannequins and Surrealist Fetishism

The word 'mannequin', in French as well as in English, refers primarily to an anthropomorphic dummy used for presenting clothes. However, the subjects of Rhys's story of the same name are live women working as models in fictional fashion designer Jeanne Veron's store on the Place Vendôme, the most prestigious shopping area in Paris. The models Anna works with in this story are defined as "types" according to which clothes are selected for them to present: "the *gamine,*" "the *blonde enfant,*" "the *femme fatale*"; Anna is the "*jeune fille*" (*LB,* 64). The women seem to retain their roles even when not on display for customers, even when they share the lunch table. Their positioning in the shabby dressing-room referred to as a "conservatory" (*LB,* 61), and their luncheon in an austere underground room parallel them with mechanically produced types of mannequin dummies in a storehouse. When Anna exits the shop after a busy day, she seems to be a mannequin dummy come alive, still pretty and an object of gazes, yet a feeling subject.

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49 In this chapter, I will be using both the notions of 'agency' and 'subjectivity', 'agent' and 'subject'. 'Subject' gets its meaning primarily in a dichotomy with 'object', as noted in the introduction. Thus, when referring to a subject, I am referring to a party in an imaginary relation that involves the active doer, perceiver or experiencer, and the receiving object that is perceived and appears in experience. However, as the point of departure here is that such constructions rarely suffice to explain the varieties of agency in the texts studied, or in the world, and a different discourse of agency might be far more enlightening also in terms of *things*, the use of the term 'subject' here is always slightly distanced, and refers to a way of thinking to which this study does not completely subscribe.

Intertextually, mannequins evoke both *Pygmalion* and E.T.A. Hoffmann's Olimpia doll in *Der Sandmann.* In Freud's analysis of the story in his essay on *das Unheimliche* (1919), he moves from linking the horror caused by animated dolls with a transgression of the boundary of animate and inanimate to the theory of the uncanny as a covert recognition of a repressed desire. However, as Jukka Sarjala (2015, 125) explains, Hoffman's story may also be terrifying because it shakes the foundational belief in the superior agency of a (rational) human subject, and instead suggests that there may be forms of agency in the nonhuman world. The anthropomorphism of dolls and the uncanny prospect of their animation also exposes a thin line between the human and the nonhuman in Rhys's story. Using the term 'mannequin' and foregrounding the way the models' bodies function almost as dolls come alive it questions the ontological distinction between human and nonhuman "bodies."

Fashion dummies embody the fetishist concerns of the beginning of the 20th century. They transcend human imperfections and mortality, but at the same time bind the human form to the world of objects, and display a sexualized, commodified version of an ideal, female body as an object of desire. In Rhys's work, the motif of the mannequin t is a clear allusion to the thematic of the consumer society and the urban environments in and about which she was writing, but it also forms an intertextual link with the surrealist movement. The founding theoretician of surrealism, André Breton, found magical meaning in uncanny fusions of the animate and the inanimate, in unexpected places and encounters, and in found objects. The movement presents the most apparent mix of psychoanalytical and Marxist fetishism within the modern avant-garde. Breton aspired to show the imaginary as part of the real and thus break down distinctions between material and ideal, subjective and objective. On the level of artworks, this is shown in the aesthetics of the *objet trouvé* (coined by Marcel Duchamp), in the discoveries of mythical and magical meanings in urban cityscapes as realizations of chance and fate (in works such as *Nadja* [1928] by Breton and *Paysan de Paris* [1926] by Louis Aragon), and countless visual repetitions that parallel the animate and the inanimate, the natural and the artificial.

Quite a substantial proportion of surrealist and dada photography of the 1920s and 1930s features the representation of female bodies or body parts in connection with the world of objects. These images explore an ambiguity and deliberate oppositions of animate and inanimate, natural and artificial (see Image 1). Man Ray's picture of "legs within a frame" objectifies the allegedly female lower legs sticking through a frame, and simultaneously animates the resulting artwork-within-artwork: we can imagine that the legs begin to

swing or walk. The frequency of similar motifs reflects an obsession with female body parts, but also an interest in artwork with intrinsic powers and corporeality.

The shop mannequin seems to have been a particularly fruitful motif in art. Mannequins and their body parts frequent surrealist and dada photographs and installations (Image 2), and paintings by "metaphysical" artists such as Giorgio de Chirico and Salvador Dali. In the first manifesto of surrealism, Breton writes of its central term 'the marvelous' (*le merveilleux*):

> [...] the marvellous is not the same in every period of history; it partakes in some obscure way of a sort of general revelation only the fragments of which come down to us: they are the romantic ruin, the modern mannequin, or any other symbol, capable of affecting the human sensibility for a period of time. (Breton 1924, 12)

The mannequin is here seen as a particularly modern symbolic fragment, something transcendent that appeals to the human imagination or the unconscious, comparable to the ruin that fascinated the romantics. What makes it modern, presumably, is its origin in the world of fashion and consumption, and its place in the public space of city streets, enhanced by documents such as Eugène Atget's photographs of Paris (Image 3).

Breton's chest with mannequin legs and hands (Image 2) was part of The Surrealist Exhibition of 1938 in Paris, where a number of installations were collected in a specific corridor called "*Rue des Mannequins*" through which the viewers passed to reach the rest of the exhibition. It included works such as André Masson's dummy with its head enclosed in a birdcage (Image 4), and Marcel Duchamp's mannequin, with its upper body dressed in formal masculine clothes and the lower part naked except for men's shoes, set in front of street-signs denoting actual and fictional places. All the mannequins-as-sculptures are female[50] and are sexualized with innuendoes of prostitution, violence, restriction, and objectification. The event, according to Lewis Kachur, confirms "the long-standing surrealist fetishization of the female body" (Kachur 2001, 38). As exhibition pieces, the mannequins were shocking, and might have challenged the way the female body was fetishized by the capitalist fashion market. However, the installation repeats and celebrates this logic of objectification by transforming the artificial bodies from commercial to surrealist fetishes, transcendental symbols of the movement. The *Rue des Mannequins* reproduces normative parallels of woman and interior (a chest of drawers, a birdcage) and the image of woman as silent (mannequins with their mouths covered by flowers or



50 Sonia Mossé was the only female artist in this installation.

Image 1. Man Ray, 1930: Jambes dans un cadre (Legs within a frame)

Image 2. Man Ray, 1938: Cadavre exquis/Chest with legs


Image 3. Eugene Atget, 1925: Mannequin

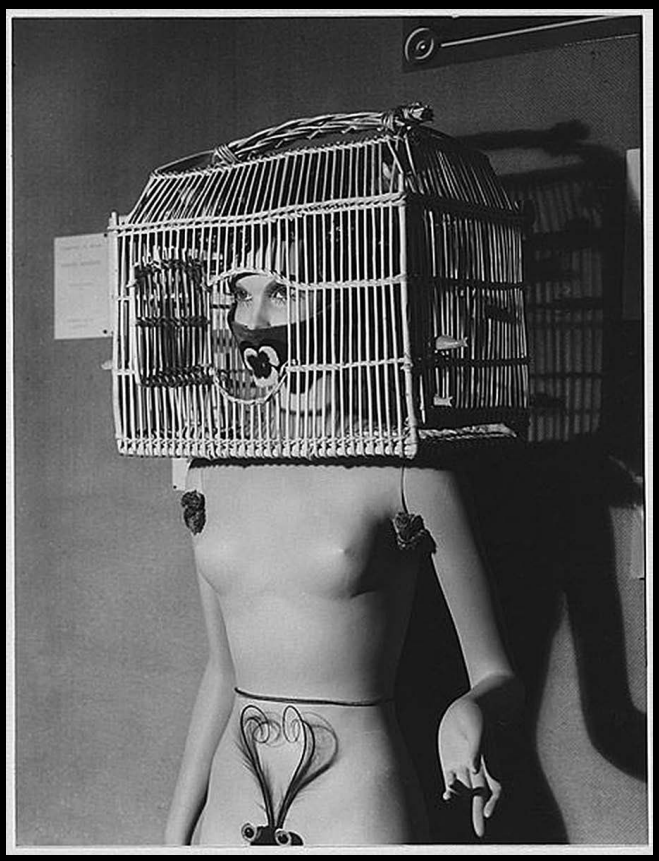

Image 4. Man Ray, 1938: Mannequin d'André Masson

cockroaches), and celebrates the public display of the female body as a subversive act. The *Rue des Mannequins* may have been shocking, but it did not shake normative ideas about the materiality of the female body or its agency. Rather, it reproduced them by focusing on the symbolic potential of the body and displaying the mannequins as imprisoned and mute instead of animated.

Jean Rhys was living in Paris at the time of the exhibition, and set her last interwar novel, *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), in Paris around the same period in 1937. This year also featured one of the last Great Exhibitions in Paris and the "Degenerate Art Exhibition" organized by the Nazi party in Munich. The novel presents the motif of exhibition mostly as haunting and oppressive, as experienced by its main character, Sasha Jansen. It evokes the surrealist connection by featuring striking motifs of mannequins and a nightmare scene with inanimate fingers pointing and street signs reading: "This way to the Exhibition"[51] (Rhys 1985, 350; Britzolakis 2007, 472–474). Sasha is a lonely woman walking the streets of Paris, shopping and dreaming of new clothes and hair color; thus, she participates in the commodification masquerade. She experiences both an abstract sense and concrete occurrences of the threat of violence and different forms of sexual trading, that evoke the darker associations of the mannequin motif, yet this novel uses the parallel between woman and mannequin to a different end than the Surrealist Exhibition. It is narrated and focalized by a woman whose first-person perspective with whom the reader of the story is invited to identify. Sasha is shown dreaming of dresses, trying on hats and having her hair dyed in ways that emphasize her role as a consumer and a potential "mannequin" exhibiting the things she has purchased, but her hopes and disappointments, and moments of happiness related to the things she experiences make her perspective lived and embodied in a way that differs starkly from the surrealist presentations of mannequins.

In "Mannequin," Anna is a focalizing subject whose body is objectified by the gaze of others, but whose own perspective is maintained in the story. Anna's lived perspective implies that like her the other mannequins, however typified and objectified even by the narrating voice of the story, have their own subjectivities and interests beyond the type. "Mannequin" offers textual cues for the enactment of embodied experience especially in its depiction of the relationship between Anna's body, the spaces of the shop and the clothes that

51 Here the overt reference is to the 1937 *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* in Paris, which Sasha Jansen does visit in the novel. There is no biographical evidence that Rhys visited the surrealist exhibition.

she is wearing, enough to lend her character a sense of subjectivity and agency that counterbalance her presentation as an object of gaze comparable to a fashion dummy. Many of Rhys's characters are themselves presented as fetishes in the manner of fashion dummies, but in her texts, this means *animate things*, not only parties in a system of lack and objectification. Thus, as can be seen in Section 3.3, Rhys gives voice, a lived body, and a first-person perspective to an emblem of the reification and objectification of woman, while criticizing these practices; the surrealist focus on the mannequin and woman as a transcendent symbol and a sexualized fetish neither achieves nor pursues this goal.

### 3.1.2. Magical Practices and Supernatural Irony

The surrealists also favored other forms of magical thinking than fetishism, and cultivated various occult practices. Rhys, too, uses the motif of spiritualism. In "At the Villa d'Or" (1927), Mrs. and Mr. Valentine host promising artists in their home on the French Riviera. Mrs. Valentine bores "Sara of Montparnasse," one of the guests and the focalizer of the story, with her rambling talk "of the emptiness of life before she became a spiritualist, of automatic writing" (*LB*, 159). 'Spiritualism' refers to the belief in the existence of and the possibility to communicate with another world, involving the spirits of the dead. The ritualized spiritualist *séances* often involved practices such as automatic writing, "spirit photography" and telepathy (Armstrong 2005, 123). During the late 19th and early 20th century, the movement was popular among Western middle- and upper-class people, especially women, but scientists and writers such as William James, H.D., James Joyce and Virginia Woolf[52] (Armstrong 2005, 123) were also intrigued. Leigh Wilson argues that the domains of the occult and magical thinking offered some modernists a chance to redefine the meanings of mimesis and representation. A séance was a useful model for a modernist approach to writing because it, on the one hand, made visible the topical question of the uncertain power of language to communicate, and on the other hand, involved "taking the metaphor seriously," challenging the idea of language as representative of reality by the idea that "words magically create the things they name" (Wilson 2013, 12, 14, 20).

In Rhys's story, Mrs. Valentine seems to transfer her belief in spirits to the everyday material world and its new, technological gadgets, whereby they gain an animistic tone that is simultaneously uncanny and comical:

52 Zadel Turner Barnes, Djuna Barnes's grandmother, was one of the pioneers of spiritualism (Armstrong 2005, 122).

> "Sometimes", said Mrs. Valentine to Sara, "I play the Victrola[53] for hours all by myself when Bobbie is in the billiard-room, and I think how strange it is that lovely music—and voices of people who are dead—like Caruso—coming out of a black box. Their voices—Themselves in fact—And I just get frightened to death—terrified. I shut it up and run up the stairs and ring like mad for Marie." (*LB*, 163–164)

In Mrs. Valentine's mind, the voices of deceased singers like the tenor Enrico Caruso (1873–1921) equal "themselves," trapped in a little black box. According to Armstrong (2005, 127), the phenomenon of spiritualism is linked with the new discoveries of modern physics and the technologies afforded by it, especially the radio, which was a recurrent metaphor for telepathy. In Rhys's story, modern audio technology becomes infested with magic and the uncanny, but the reader, I would argue, is expected to keep his or her guard up, not share the bias toward the magical, but rather maintain an ironical distance; this is also the most common stance taken by modernist writers toward spiritualism[54] (Ibid., 120). Mrs. Valentine is a comical character with whom readers are not invited to identify, but rather to marvel at as a spectacle of privilege and ignorance. Her life used to be "empty" but is now filled with fashionable beliefs and magical practices. At the same time, she is troubled by superstitions roused by technological gadgets that arouse associations to death and spirits. This is shown in contrast to the superior clarity of mind but inferior socioeconomic position of Sara, whose point of view readers *are* invited to share.

"A Spiritualist" (1927) introduces, not exactly a spiritualist, but another privileged and superstitious character faced with the spirits of the dead meddling in the material world. It begins with a framing story, in which a male character, "The Commandant," relates a story of a recent occurrence to the unnamed narrator whose gender is not specified. It is an account of his visit to the apartment of his former lover, Madeleine, after her sudden and untimely death from an unspecified illness, to gather some of her "clothes and [...] effects" for her mother. The visit turns supernatural:

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53 A brand name for a phonograph produced from the beginning of the 20th century until the 1960s by the American company appropriately named, Victor Talking Machine Company.

54 In "A Solid House" (1963), there is a similar story line of a younger woman staying in the house of an older friend, and distancing herself from the latter's interest in spiritualism (cf. Section 2.1).

> "Well, suddenly, there came from the closed sitting-room a very loud, a terrible crash. The floor shook." [...]
>
> "You must understand that it was a flat on the fourth floor; all the windows of the sitting-room were tightly shut, naturally, and the blinds were drawn as I had left them on the day of the funeral. The door into the hall was locked, the other led into the bedroom where I was."
>
> "And, there, lying right in the middle of the floor was a block of white marble, perhaps fifty centimeters square." (*LB*, 40)

The loud, unexpected, and unexplainable materialization of a block of white marble recalls a famous early gothic motif from Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). The novel's events are set forth when a gigantic steel helmet falls from out of nowhere and crushes the young prince of the castle on his wedding day. The rest of the novel merges supernatural events with (half incestuous) marriage and power schemes and accidental homicide. This intertextual link is illustrative of the theme, and partly the tone, of Rhys's story: it is equally about sexual relations, power, and death, but also adds a dose of irony and distance to the realm of the magical. The narrator of the story expounds on the material circumstances of the appearance of the marble block that had not been there when they entered, as the housekeeper Gertrude confirms. The crash and the appearance of the block of marble are persuasively framed by detailed descriptions of the circumstances and even the estimated measurements of the block,[55] which serve to underline its supernatural potential: it cannot have been placed there by someone with human strength, who would have been held back by closed doors and windows. The setting is also made uncanny by the memory of death it contains, since it has been left untouched since Madeleine's death.

The gothic mode continues in the descriptions of the reactions of the two characters in Madeleine's apartment. The Commandant freezes, looking at "the thing"; Gertrude crosses herself, "pale as death," and leaves, saying: "[t]here is something strange about this flat" (*LB,* 41). Nevertheless, the Commandant portrays himself as relatively courageous in his own story, staying in the flat after Gertrude has fled, also reproducing a gothic trope, in which the point of view of a rational, educated, upper-class focalizer is contrasted with that of a superstitious, unreliable lower-class domestic, found in novels such as *Otranto* and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Rhys's story reverses these roles. The Commandant explains his bravery by knowledge of the reasons of the occurrence, which do not, however, "naturalize" it, as it remains within the domain of the supernatural:



55 The helmet in *Otranto* is "a hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being" (Walpole 1964, 15–16).

> I had promised her a beautiful, white marble tombstone, and I had not yet ordered it. Not because I had not thought of it. Oh, no—but because I was too sad, too tired. But the little one doubtless thought that I had forgotten. It was her way of reminding me. (Ibid.)

Thus, he provides a magical explanation along with some excuses for his conduct. His interlocutor, the first-person narrator intradiegetic in the frame story, reacts incredulously, as if trying to determine whether he is being jocular or serious: "I looked hard at the Commandant. His eyes were clear and as naïve as a child's" (Ibid.). Therefore, the short story itself is not a straightforward leap into fantasy that the reader is invited to join in a willing suspension of disbelief. The magical event appears in it only as related by one of its characters, one who is clearly unreliable. The Commandant would like to present himself as the bright and fearless hero of a gothic tale, but the frame story presents him as naïve and childish.

In "A Spiritualist," the fantastical narrative is turned into a medium of gender- and genre-sensitive irony. An attitude toward women motivates the Commandant's story: it begins and ends by his musing about them as "disappointing," "lacking in calm and balance," and having "droll ideas" (*LB,* 37, 42). He provides the actual example of these characteristics at the end of the story, by relating another woman's comment on his account of the tombstone: "How furious that poor Madeleine must have been that she missed you" (*LB,* 42). With this added point of view, the reader is invited to imagine the poor, belittled woman who "gave way in everything" (*LB,* 39) as a furious lady taking violent revenge from beyond the grave rather than providing a gentle reminder, as the Commandant would like to believe. Even as such, "Poor Madeleine" is another revision of the gothic. She repeats a prototype of the gothic heroine such as Walpole's Matilda and Radcliffe's Emily, virtuous and fragile, but strong and resourceful when encountering dreadful obstacles. The Commandant-Spiritualist is quite obviously the emotional, childish character in the story, the one with "droll ideas."

In the core story of "A Spiritualist," however, Madeleine is also a ghost, and there remains an ambiguity to the magical side of the story, which makes it an exception in the context of *The Left Bank* and Rhys's fiction in general. No alternative explanation is given for the appearance of the block, except for the unreliability of the Commandant. The framing structure makes it easier for readers to distance themselves from the magical, fantastic elements of the story, but for the materialized irony of the story to work fully, they must to some extent be immersed in the story of the girl spirit's material revenge through a block of marble. This is entirely plausible, as readers are likely to, as Merja Polvinen suggests, beside engaging enactively with the events

and characters in the fictional world, engage with these experiences *as produced by fiction,* not only playing along with the suggestions and conventions of the story, but also remaining rooted in the real world. Similarly, engaging in critical reflection need not mean being aloof from the story (Polvinen 2016, 20). Readers may be able to tolerate the ontological ambiguity of the block of marble in the fictional world, as its rules are different from the real one.

Why, then, does the author use a block of white marble as a means of supernatural revenge? What is the actual role of this material thing in the story and how is its ambiguous relation to magic and fantasy to be read? Compared to the other things that are referred to in Rhys's fiction, such as clothes, jewelry, and tableware, it is a heavy object in several senses. A block of "fifty centimeters square" undoubtedly makes a loud noise and causes the floor to shake when it falls. An unused tombstone is also heavy with meaning, with its white, smooth surface evoking youth, purity, and death. Its concrete weight also gives more sense of weight to the imagined act of "the little one" throwing it from the realm of spirits. In its macabre appearance, the tombstone also exposes the macabre nature of the Commandant's promise. This blend of metaphor and stony materiality recalls the modernist mode of representation that "takes metaphor seriously" as Wilson above put it: the block of marble, *as* narrated by someone who believes in it as real, becomes real to the extent that it can be used as a fictional tool for evoking imaginary materiality. It can be seen as a conceptual metaphor that not only evokes an image but also appeals to a variety of senses, relying on the embodied cognitive schemata connecting heaviness with a somber mood or difficulty, in addition to the culturally defined meanings we are able to attach to a tombstone (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 2003). The reader is invited to feel the material reality—its texture and weight—and the sound made by the tombstone, and they are connected to the subsequent interpretation as complementary to its cultural, symbolic function. In this case, they give concrete *weight* to the tombstone's associations with death and to the gesture of revenge with which it is paired in the story.

The text, like "At the Villa D'Or," builds a community of implicitly like-minded subjects, containing the narrator, Madeleine, the earlier female commenter of the ghost story, the implied author and the authorial audience, who are likely to take the same side against the Commandant. Both stories take an ironical stance toward fashionable forms of superstition and use the material manifestations of these beliefs (the Victrola, the marble block), not only to build a comical, ironically distanced mode, but also to maintain an ambiguous relation to the fantastic. This move contributes to Rhys's reimagination of fetishism, as it repositions its female characters, depending on whether they are suggested as sympathetic or not, either to fear the magical powers of animation in things, or to fantastically profit from them. Thus, especially "A Spiritualist" parodies both modern magical thinking and the gothic, but does so in a reparative way that appropriates the tropes and finds new affordances in them.

### 3.1.3. Lucky Dresses and Loquacious Parks: Magical and Material Challenges to Modern Fetishism

Rhys's stories give fetishist powers to things, not only in their modern commodified and sexualized forms, which have been extensively researched elsewhere, but also as simply material things. Judith Kegan Gardiner writes of the narrator of "On Not Shooting Sitting Birds" (1976), a typical Rhysian female character whose well-prepared date with a man goes awry because of assumed class differences and prejudices: "[she is] in a sexual transaction, agreeing to a tryst whose conclusion seems foreknown and complicitly making herself a commodity or fetish for the affair by packaging herself in new silk underwear" (Gardiner 1989, 10). But is new silk underwear in Rhys merely packaging for "a commodity or fetish"? We observed above how Rhys gives a "subjective" point of view to objectified mannequin characters and thereby challenges the distinction between human subject and nonhuman object. In general, she seems to provide her readers with a more complicated picture of what it is like to be a fetishized body. Emily Apter suggests that the notion of the fetish as a talisman "implicitly empowers the female collectible" (Apter 1991, 43). The gist of Apter's argument is that the fetish object, in this case the woman as a fetishized body, is not only objectified and made passive by desire and gaze, but also gains power of its own over its fetishizer. I wish to argue here that Rhys's texts pursue and achieve a similar aim, but that evocations of materiality and experientiality are necessary for this empowerment.

To be effective a talisman should be touched and worn close to the body. William Pietz has shown that material and sensory factors tend to be forgotten in modern discourses of fetishism (Pietz 1993, 144). Drawing on Walter Benjamin's version of modern magical thinking, Maurizia Boscagli sees in fetishism a performative power and a sense of excess in which neither the subject nor the object becomes reified, and suggests turning the abstract and disembodied discourses of fetishism toward its inherent pleasure. This view "reclaims pleasure by looking at the object as a visual-tactile phenomenon, to be approached synaesthetically through all the senses rather than through the mind or the eye" (Boscagli 2014, 47). It is this pleasure in tactile materiality that Boscagli considers having potential for change. In a similar vein, the following discussion aims to show how items such as "new silk underwear" function both as talismans and as evocations of materiality and sensuous experience, in both ways contributing to a sense of distributed agency beyond the subject-object dichotomy.

Most of the references to magical thinking and fetishism in *The Left Bank* are not bound to certain systems of belief like spiritualism. However, the motif of *Obeah* is present in "Mixing Cocktails," one of the stories in *The Left Bank* set in the Caribbean islands. The narrator, a young girl, remembers the family's cook, "the old 'Obeah' woman," telling her not to look too much at the moon: "The moon does bad things to you if it shines on you when you sleep..." (*LB,* 91). 'Obeah' is a common term for a system of varied beliefs and practices of African origin practiced in the former colonies of the Caribbean, "dependent on ritual invocation, fetishes and charms" (Fernández-Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 2011, 155). Its practices involve both "white" and "black" magic, the use of fetishes for the purposes of luck and protection, and for attacking the oppressors during slave trade (Ibid., 157). Fetishes in this case mean objects constructed of human and animal body parts (hair, nails, and blood), items of (under)clothing, and dirt, which are then placed strategically around a house or a person, usually to protect them (Ibid., 167). Although Rhys was born in Dominica, her background in a former slave-owning family distances her from indigenous practices. Thereby, she refers to them as an outsider, but not quite as completely as that of many other modernist artists who appropriated Caribbean and African cultures in their work.

Talismanic thinking is present in the way Rhys's stories portray things and spaces as lucky or unlucky, sinister, or friendly. In *Good Morning, Midnight,* the protagonist Sasha, with her characteristic ironic tone, describes her life as follows:

> [...] a complicated affair of cafés where they like me and cafes where they don't, streets that are friendly, streets that aren't, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I never shall be, looking-glasses I look nice in, looking-glasses I don't, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won't, and so on. (Rhys 1985, 371)

Cafés where one is or is not liked are quite easy to fit within a Western rationalist world view, and the rest of the excerpt might also be apt as it features instances of magical thinking that do not require the evocations of distant places and cultures. For Rhys, Lucky things are often dresses, but can also be pieces of underwear, like for the narrator of "On Not Shooting Sitting Birds" in *Sleep It off Lady.*

However, the frequency with which friendly or unfriendly streets and lucky or unlucky clothes are encountered in Rhys's interwar fiction makes them seem like the very foundations on which the world of its characters is built. Elizabeth Wilson compares the practice of ascribing luck to an item of dress to the process between a child and a transitional object, often also a piece of cloth, theorized by Donald W. Winnicott (2005, 383). A transitional object is a stand-in for the mother and a means for the baby to cautiously approach a direct contact with the world, without the mediation of the mother (Ibid.).

In a comparable manner, a lucky dress can be a protecting layer between the embodied self and the world, being simultaneously part of both in its material presence. A dress may seem lucky because it is beautiful or stylish, but it may also become a symbol of good luck after it has been worn on a happy or successful occasion; thus, it can seem to bear a residue in the folds of its materiality. With Rhys, it is more often the first than the second case. The lucky objects are part of daydreams of the future or regretful musings of the past that could have had a different future, as in the case of a certain black dress in *Good Morning, Midnight*: "If I had been wearing it I should never have stammered or been stupid" (Rhys 1985, 360).

Nevertheless, the idea of a residue and a fetishist metonymical relation between a piece of clothing and the body of its wearer is also present in Rhys's work. By the metonymical relation I mean a process in which the owner and wearer gives something of herself to the dress to "give it life" and make it an extension of her memories and experiences; in a similar manner, the dress contains something of the world outside, past events or future dreams, that have a magical effect on its wearer as in the tradition of Obeah.

The most central object motif in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is Antoinette's red dress already mentioned in Section 2.3 as a container for the experience of time and space. It travels with her from Martinique to England and thereby becomes a transitional object in a slightly different sense. The dress carries residue of her past in Martinique, which can be concretely felt as a sensation of warmth, in contrast with the cold English climate. The red dress is a symbol of Antoinette's selfhood and agency, as well as a narrative hint of the fire of Thornfield Hall to come, but it also evokes a bodily sense of a warm, material protective layer against the hostile surroundings. Antoinette gives life to her dress, but in return the dress preserves her memories and protects her sense of wholeness.

In some stories, the lucky or unlucky objects are also personified and given a voice. "Illusion" (1927) is a story about the temperate artist Miss Bruce, whose secret habit of collecting exquisite dresses and luxurious cosmetics is revealed to the first-person narrator when she is let into Miss Bruce's room to retrieve some of her things after she has been hospitalized. The narrator imagines a dress talking: "'Wear me, give me life', it would seem to say to her, 'and I will do my damnedest for you!'" (*LB,* 34–35). The human wearer gives life to the thing, but in exchange the thing will "do its damnedest" for its owner and wearer. The dress needs a human being to come alive, as it were, but then it will act as a talisman, protect its wearer, work against threats, and provide potential success. The dress as a lucky charm is relatively innocent, but a dimension of black magic is added

by the pronounced expression of the idiom "I will do my damnedest for you!" Talking objects can be read as simply a manifestation of prosopopoeia and personification, or as rhetorical devices that lend voice to and animate the inanimate and humanize the nonhuman. As Satoshi Nishimura notes, "it is difficult to speak about inanimate objects without giving them any human properties" (Nishimura 2015, 34). In fact, the frequency and emphasis of this device in Rhys's writing invites further questions: why has it been chosen over some others? Whose thoughts are being voiced by the inanimate speakers? In "Illusion," the voices are imagined by the narrator of the story, and they arise out of an empathic relation toward *both* the clothes and their owner, the outwardly tidy and unnoticeable collector of flamboyant dresses.

*Good Morning, Midnight* introduces animated versions not only of dresses, but also of houses, hotel rooms, streets and windows, that are given prosopopoeical lines of speech in the novel, beginning from its first sentence: "'Quite like the old times', the room says. 'Yes? No?'" (Rhys 1985, 347). The environment becomes an inanimate interlocutor, as Sasha strolls the streets of Paris recalling her memories. The personified talking city as a literary device underlines the loneliness of the focal character and introduces her emotions and memories to the reader. It is also a device borrowed from advertising, a discourse on which Rhys's writing often draws: the type in which cleaning products, oats packages and butter begin to speak (Parsons 2008, 19). These recall the speaking commodity already present in Marx's famous formulation of the commodity fetish. According to Emma Zimmerman (2015, 80), Rhys's use of prosopopoeia points toward the realm of the uncanny and leads to ambiguities as to "whether Rhys is attempting to suspend our disbelief by presenting us with a room that does really speak—after all, it is marked as direct speech—or if this is in fact some sort of psychological projection." In this case, I suggest that the talking room is a textual device of evoking the experience of thoughts and emotions being brought forth or "afforded" by the material features of the environment; here it is not necessary to view the relationship between Sasha and the speaking room as projective. Simultaneously, it can be viewed as part of the quasi-magical worldview of the novel, with its places and objects that can either enhance or diminish the powers of one owning or using them. In may not be a case for the suspension of disbelief, but one resting on the readers' capacity to simultaneously engage in fantasy and know it to be a fictional device, as was suggested in the case of the Commandant and the block of marble.

In the short impressionistic story "In the Luxemburg Gardens" [sic.] (1927), the park counsels a "very depressed young man" strolling in it: "Such a waste of time, say the Luxemburg Gardens, to be morose. Are there not always Women and Pretty Legs and Green Hats" (*LB,* 71–72). In referring to a woman who has just walked past, the Gardens seem to voice a simultaneously surrealist and commercialist, fetishist tendency to identify living women with parts of their body and

fashionable apparel (see Section 5.1).[56] In this story, the girl is objectified as the life-giving fetish, while the park is personified in a gesture of *narrative* magic. Here the gender positions are conventional and resemble surrealist fetishism: the woman equals her body equals her hat; all are introduced in capital initials to elevate and typify them to something larger and more general than their actual materiality. In the context of the whole collection (and the rest of Rhys's work), however, such arrangements become questioned by such stories as "The Mannequin," discussed above, in which the type and the fetish are given a voice and experiences.

A more challenging instance of fetishist imagery is found in the description of an unfriendly part of Paris, a Montparnasse street in the story, "In the Rue de l'Arrivée." Here a "sinister and unholy" pharmacy that Dorothy, the focal character, passes a display with a little box containing a "waxen head of a gentleman with hollow eyes, thin lips and a tortured and evil expression," with a card saying "I suffered from diseases of the stomach, liver, kidneys, from neurasthenia, anaemia and loss of vitality before taking the Elixir of Abbé Pierre ..." (*LB,* 118). The grotesque attempt to advertise an all-curing elixir with a hideous display of illness is rendered both uncanny and comical by its confusion of animate and inanimate: a wax head announces having suffered from "loss of vitality."

Dorothy, too, is depressed and suffering, and like the young man in the Luxembourg gardens, she finds momentary consolation in a passer-by. A man tries to talk to her, but when turned down, he passes on without the insisting attempts Dorothy has become used to in Paris. The consoling line of speech, however, is given not to the man as a speaking subject, but to the *gestalt* formed by his body and clothes: "The back of his cap and his supple slouching walk seemed to say: *'Tout s'arrangera, va!'*" (*LB,* 120.) The man does not speak, which renders him sympathetic from Dorothy's point of view, and his modest dress and posture (he is not a "gentleman" like the wax head, or many other male characters portrayed in a negative light in Rhys's fiction) work to tell her that "everything will be OK." Dorothy's gaze and his silence align him with the inanimate surroundings, but make him the only positively valued element among them. In the context of the entire collection, the man also becomes parallel with the objectified woman-as-fetish in the Luxembourg gardens. "In the Rue de L'Arrivée" and "In the Luxemburg Gardens" show different aspects of the same issue, which can be justified even by the similarity of their

56 Intertextually, the hat in the passage recalls Michael Arlen's popular novel "The Green Hat" (1924), in which the said accessory is an emblem of beauty, fashion, and high society.

titles. Both are short, sketch-like renderings of a moment of being embedded in an environment, a link made stronger by the way the thoughts and experiences of the characters are shown to extend to the environment, and how the surrounding things have power to affect the experience and the mood of the characters; sometimes they act as enhancing talismans, while other times they are quite the opposite.

The analysis of talismans and personification demonstrates that it might sometimes make sense to conceive of objects as agents rather than as parts of the background. Researchers have demonstrated how narratives with nonhuman narrators point to a tendency to highlight the other as an object to maintain the image of oneself as a subject (Bernaerts et al. 2014, 70). Rhys's talking things are textual-rhetorical devices that make use of poetic license to imagine, but they are strictly rooted in the "real" as material things inviting the reader's use of sensory imagination, and are often used to criticize human cruelty and alienation. On the other hand, they also evoke compassion and a sense of wholeness, and offer a way to rethink the human beyond subject and object. At the same time, the stories are a manifestation of a view of literature itself as magical, a way of not representing something existing but absent (in the economy of lack), but of creating worlds and things and giving them life that affects readers in the world (cf. Wilson 2013, 12).

Rhys's writing participates in a general modernist quest to give voice to the inanimate, for the purpose of expanding human subjectivity to the nonhuman, practicing transcendental symbolism, or attempting to approach "things as they are" (Nishimura 2015, 33). In its several forms, magical thinking is a thread that runs through Rhys's stories in *The Left Bank* as well as her novels, notably *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. What is remarkable in these texts, however, is the complexity with which they address both magical thinking in general and fetishism in particular. Magical thinking and different forms of superstition are allusions to the gothic, residues of childhood and different cultures, and means of escapism for alienated individuals; yet they are also an integral part of modern and urban life. Fetishism in Rhys's work goes beyond commodities and the sexualization of objects or female body parts, as it involves the common practices of using inanimate things as talismans and as transitional objects, to provide protection and enhancement. Indeed, in featuring these practices, Rhys's work often reverses human-thing relations, finding a sense of power and agency where passivity and victimhood are normally found.

## 3.2 Djuna Barnes and the Excess of Fetishism

The psychoanalytical framework of fetishism, which is a relevant one to relate to Barnes's fiction, does not really allow fetishism for women (Schor 1995, 95). Jean Rhys, by employing versions of fetishism not arising from the Freudian framework, but rather from religious and animistic practices, portrays her female characters as equally capable of fetishism as the male ones, which was unusual at the beginning of the 20th century. She shares this stance with Djuna Barnes. Freud does claim, as Jann Matlock points out, that all women are clothes fetishists (Matlock 1993, 60), but his oedipal scheme generally reserves fetishism to the male in the grips of castration anxiety. This was already the case in pre-Freudian discussions of fetishism as a sexual pathology, as Matlock has shown (Ibid.). Even some feminist critics, like Elizabeth Grosz, maintain that the Freudian scheme needs to be left more or less as it is, and wind up labelling fetishist women with a "masculinity complex" in which "they refuse their castrated condition and continue to believe in their own phallic position" (Grosz 1993, 101, 110, 112).

Djuna Barnes's stories from the first decades of the 20th century feature things that had by then become classic fetish objects: dolls, boots and whips, corsets, velvet, and lace. In part, they can be counted among the many intertextual references of the texts, toward decadent and naturalist fiction of the end of the 19th century, as well as to the discourses of psychoanalysis and sexology. However, the way these motifs recur is repetition with a difference. This section sets out to show how Barnes's writing, by parodying discourses of fetishism, offers alternative ways of thinking about agency, sexuality, and power through human-thing relations. The analyses refer to features of the original context of writing, but also begin to open the discussion toward the potential agency of things beyond fetishism and animism. A focus on materiality and the agential potential of things inherent in fetishism brings to light, how Barnes's texts interact with the multifaceted concept, while challenging some of the basic assumptions and gendered biases sedimented on it. Her fictional women might well be

said to "refuse their castrated condition," but in this refusal they challenge the whole discourse of fetishism.

The notions of lack and loss seem inseparable from the psychoanalytic (and to some extent the Marxist) conception of fetishism. The Freudian fetish is actually a product of the *denial* of lack, wrought with contradictions: "a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it" (Freud 1974, 154), involving both the disavowal and the affirmation of the castration (Ibid., 156). As a protection from a threat that originates in negation (the alleged "nothing" that the theory substitutes the female genital with), *and* a surplus, a material "representation" of nothingness whose very materiality is used and enjoyed, fetishism thus conceived implies a fantasy of having it both ways: eating the cake and having it, too. The implications of this ambiguity for female sexuality and agency are far from clear-cut. Several feminist scholars have used this territory of ambiguity and mimetic play to challenge the fetishism as an exclusively male phenomenon, the identification of female genitalia with lack, and the fetishization of the female body (cf. for instance, Irigaray 1985; Apter 1991, 1993; Schor 1995). In the following, I will build on such critics, as well as on the new materialist approaches exemplified by the work of Maurizia Boscagli.

The discussion is divided according to a typology of things that arises from Barnes's texts and the context of fetishism. The first part discusses the fetishization of the body and its members in the motif of the doll; secondly, the focus is on classic objects associated with (masculine) phallic power, namely whips, boots and leather; lastly, I discuss an array of items of feminine attire that frequent the discourse of fetishism, such as underwear, shoes, lace, and jewelry, and the way they are combined with the recurring, typified character of the *phallic woman*. With the aim of challenging the early schemes of fetishism, this grouping is justified by the way Barnes's texts clearly draw from exactly these schemes, even if only to parody them. This happens, once more, through the introduction of materiality and lived, bodily experience, as well as another discourse of fetishism with its ideas of the performative powers of the talisman.

### 3.2.1. Dolls and Dismemberment

Barnes most explicitly explored the motif of the doll in the novel *Nightwood* (1936). Robin Vote gives her lover, Nora, the main focal character, a doll as a present, and dubs its significance as "the life they cannot have, [...] their child" (Barnes 2007=*N*, 128). In a fit of rage, Robin is seen holding the doll (as she has earlier held her own baby) above her head as if to smash it, and evidently, she does destroy it. Nora also finds a similar doll in the house of Robin's new lover, Jenny. The doll is converted to a subject of theory by Doctor Matthew O'Connor, the parodied psychoanalyst/sexologist of the novel:

> The doll and the immature have something right about them, the doll because it resembles but does not contain life, and the third sex because it contains life but resembles the doll. The blessed face! It should be seen only in profile, otherwise it is observed to be the conjunction of the identical cleaved halves of sexless misgiving! (*N*, 133–134)

This is one clear example of *Nightwood's* highly problematic use of the concepts 'the third sex', inversion and mirroring, as well as the notions of sexlessness and immaturity, and ultimately the "equation of lesbian desire with the death drive" that Clare Taylor has shown the text to present, but not completely support (Taylor 2003, 182).

Ambiguity surrounds the doll as a fetish object. It is a metonymical reference to a human child beyond the bipolar gender system and the oedipal schema, yet it also embodies normative notions of motherhood and femininity. On the other hand, motherhood can already be seen as challenging the phallocentric notion of fetishism, not only by positing the child as the surrogate penis, but also by pointing to the life-creating power of the womb. As an object of desire, the doll points toward incest; as a plaything made of inanimate matter that is given life and agency in the imagination it embodies life and death. Finally, in *Nightwood,* the doll is a thing with its own performative power, shown in human relationships where it is used as a token of love, anger, and deception. Intertextually, like Rhys's mannequins, it also evokes Freud's discussion of the uncanny, in which he refers to the fine line between children's fearless belief in their dolls as live beings, and the fear induced by the human-like doll Olimpia in Hoffmann's "Sand-Man" (Freud 1985; Johnson B. 2008, 163). The sense of the uncanny in connection with dolls can also be due to the possibility of dismemberment of their anthropomorphic bodies.

Taylor (2003, 151) links the doll to Robin as a character fetishized by other characters and by the text itself, an evasive vision of childlike sexlessness. By virtue of both her name and her behavior, she is also presented as androgynous and at times verges on nonhuman, like Rhys's mannequins. Thereby, she produces an ambiguous synthesis of male, female, human, animal and thing (cf. Rohman 2009). According to Taylor (2003, 155–158), the novel parodies the discourses of inversion, penis-envy, and sexual pathology while it remains built on its own fetishist logic of absence and disavowal, dismemberment and idealized wholeness (Ibid., 150; see also Allen 1996, 19). What is behind *Nightwood's* fetishism is not the mother's imaginary loss of a penis, but the loss of a loved (female) body that is also the reflection of an idealized self as a unified whole, which can only be maintained as an illusion: even the "blessed face" of the doll should only be seen

in profile (Taylor 2003, 183, 189). Thus, in my interpretation, what is lacking from the text and its characters as desiring fetishists, is the *whole* body in which the idea or a feeling of a self might reside; the female body, as it is, does not suffer from any lack, yet its limbs are picked apart by the narrative, to gain special desiring and loving attention, that emphasizes the capacities of these limbs for action and sensing, not merely their objecthood (cf. Ibid., 184). The multifaceted motif of the doll contributes to this discourse, being not only an idealized whole body, but also visibly made of separable components.

A similar thematic is found in "Dusie" (1927), whose titular character can be seen as a precursor of Robin. The comparison shows one example of Barnes's way of recycling motifs and characters in different contexts. "Dusie" is one of the three stories narrated by a young, cosmopolitan woman, who is named Katya in most of them, to an older, silent listener occasionally referred to as "Madame."[57] "Dusie" is situated in Paris, and in it Katya relates an obscure drama of love and jealousy taking place in a "splendid" house belonging to Madame K—, an older lady hosting young women in a salon.[58] Dusie at the center of the drama is a "very young" girl, "tall, very big and beautiful, absent and so pale" (*CS*, 404). We are told that she wears big shoes, has large ankles and wrists and long legs, and is adored by everyone:

> All people gave her their attention, stroking her, and calling her pet or beast, according to their feelings. They touched her as if she were an idol, and she stood tall, or sat to drink, unheeding, absent. You felt that you must talk to Dusie, tell her everything, because all her beauty was there but uninhabited, like a church, n'est-ce pas, madame? Only she was not holy, she was very mortal, and sometimes vulgar, a ferocious and oblivious vulgarity. (*CS*, 406)

57 The cycle originally begun with the stories "Cassation" and "The Grande Malade" published as "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady" and "The Little Girl Continues," and also including "Beyond the Heart."

58 The salon is doubtless inspired by the one Natalie Barney held in Paris, which Djuna Barnes also frequented. In his introduction to Barnes's Collected Stories, Philip Herring is bolder in charting the biographical referentiality of the story: "'Dusie' [...] is less a story than a descriptive narrative centered on the Left Bank lesbian scene which Barnes knew so well. [...] it is unmistakably about Barnes's lover Thelma Wood; the setting is Natalie Clifford Barney's house at 20 rue Jacob [...]" (Herring 1996, 20). Regardless of the compelling evidence Herring has for this claim, I think it is still justified and necessary to read "Dusie," like the rest of Barnes's fiction, more as a story than as a biographical account.

Even though Dusie is "absent," "oblivious," and "uninhabited," we gain a multifaceted image of her proportions and appeal *as a body*. The description of the size of her limbs links her to the psychoanalytical fetishist scheme, beside which Barnes evokes the language of religious fetishism in the way she is treated "as if she were an idol," and compared to a church—only to be exposed as mortal and vulgar. She is either a pet or a beast, depending on the mood of others. Dusie thus resembles an empty locus that can take on any meaning and serve the purposes of others, with her own agency only present in an animistic sense, not different from a magically animated idol—a doll. Like Robin, Dusie is equally fetishized by the characters and the text; in this case, also Katya's narration picks up just these details and persuades the reader, by way of "Madame," to accept and feel these ambiguities and unconventional metaphors with her "*n'est-ce pas?*"

Yet Dusie soon proves to have her own agency, too, which manifests in her "vulgarity": when ill, she asks "every woman" if they love her, but as they answer in the affirmative she throws them out of their room, to be left alone and to play with toys instead: "When they were gone, thrown out, she would sit up in bed and amuse herself with the dolls they had brought her, wooden animals and tin soldiers, and again she would cast them from her with cunning energy" (*CS*, 407). Dusie oscillates between the figures of the doll and the large but helpless child. She is a doll with a will of its own, a fetish that is capable of fetishizing others, too, therefore resembling Apter's reading of the "feminine collectible" (Apter 1991, 43).

The narrative draws attention to parts of Dusie's body and, as it were, enlarges them similar to an act of dismemberment that Taylor recognizes in *Nightwood* (Taylor 2003, 182–187).[59] On the other hand, an act of dismemberment also adds a parodic twist to the fetishism, exposing the fetishized members as capable of sensing, in this case, pain. The drama is played out as Dusie invites Katya to her room, where they lie naked in bed, talking about countries and cities that the cosmopolitan Katya has visited. They are interrupted by a knock on the door; Dusie leaves and Katya hears another woman, Clarissa's "sharp" voice and feels "that there was evil in her visit, and the teaching of evil, and a thing to be done with the heart of Dusie" (*CS*, 410). She falls asleep, but is woken up by Dusie who tells her to go sleep in another room. In the morning, she goes back to Dusie's room to get her dress and finds her crying, her foot crushed and bleeding. Madame K enters, takes the foot in her lap and says, without weeping

59 Taylor also refers to Barnes's play manuscript "Madame Collects Herself," in which Madame Zolbo is constructed of the body parts of her former lovers (Taylor 2003, 183).

as Katya expects: "You see how it is, she can think no evil for others, she can only hurt herself" (*CS*, 411).

It is unclear, and perhaps unimportant, who in the end has hurt whom, and the pain is not actually rendered experiential by means of focalization. Katya merely presents the crushed foot and even the cry of pain as one of the elements of the scene and the drama, again foregrounds theatricality. The story weaves a dynamic of playing, being played and hurting and being hurt, in which Dusie, albeit idolized and infantilized, is both a victim and a perpetrator. Pain can be fetishized, but broken limbs and wounds in general are less frequent in fetishist fantasies that usually involve unbroken wholeness. In "Dusie," the wound, the blood, and the painful cries complicate the image of Dusie as a doll-like, empty-but-whole fetish. Naomi Schor has shown how the fetishization of wounds in the work of George Sand challenges the phallocentric theory of fetishism and enables more "polycentric" readings of fetishism as a strategy available for women to slip out of a binary gender order, and to be seen as fetishist (Schor 1995, 93, 95). On the other hand, as a bleeding idol, Dusie points toward the realm of religious fetishism and magical thinking especially in the context of Catholic imagery such as bleeding statues of Christ and the saints, a visual tradition also recurrently evoked in Barnes's fiction. Like Rhys, Barnes complements the Marxist-Freudian thinking of fetishism with other forms of animistic belief, drawing from the sphere of religion. In this way, the fetish as a magical, (even if profane, vulgar, and bleeding) idol does not fall neatly into the dynamic of lack and representation. The agency and power of the idol rather point toward the plenteousness (even in incompleteness and imperfection) also implied by the concept; there is an enhancement rather than concealment of lack, "everything" and then some rather than "nothing."

### 3.2.2. Little Women, Large Boots

Dusie is an ample woman composed of large parts, with a specific mention of the size of her shoes, all of which are in contrast with her depiction as doll-like and childlike. Large shoes, more often specifically boots, are another repeated motif, although they are often also worn by small women. In "The Grande Malade," (1925)[60] another story with Katya and "Madame," one of the leitmotifs is a pair of boots, albeit absent ones. Katya remembers her father and his "tall shining boots that caught him just under the knee" and resolves: "Some day, when I have money, my shoes will be higher and come under my knee" (*CS*,



60 Originally published as "The Little Girl Continues"; a revised version had a new title in *Spillway* 1962.

394–395). Monsieur x (sic),[61] the lover of her sister Moydia, promises her "a pair of great boots" (*CS*, 399), but falls ill and dies; the sisters are eventually given his cape, but no boots.

In "The Grande Malade," the absence of boots is paired with the absence of the almost abstractly masculine figures of father and Monsieur x. They are positioned as phallic fetish objects and can be said to signify lack, but this lack is located in the paternal instead of the maternal sphere.[62] In yet another way, Barnes has turned the Freudian discourse of fetishism at least partly around: it is the young woman, Katya, who fetishizes the boots as a token connected to her father. For her, the boots would be a talisman of power and an enhancement of her body; she "rambl[es] on about father and his cap and boots" and "rages" that her own boots are too short when performing a drunken "Tartar dance" to her sister and Monsieur x (*CS*, 399). The fetishist of this story is not a boy afraid and in denial of imaginary castration (of the mother), but a girl wishing to appropriate a phallic accessory belonging to her absent father. Furthermore, the thematic of lack seems to be challenged by how "full" the girls' life already is: Moydia forgets Monsieur x quite easily, but keeps the "*tragique*" air that the death of the lover has lent her, along with the lover's cape of which she seems to make another talisman that builds her own character. Katya briefly laments that "in the debacle my boots were quite forgotten," but the sisters already have other things in mind, like going to America: "we speak a little French; now we must be moving on" (*CS*, 403).

Despite the absence of the male characters, I would claim that the objects fetishized by the girls signify *excess* instead of lack. Is it then even fetishism that we are dealing with here? It is justified to discuss the things in these stories, too in the context of fetishism, for several reasons. Firstly, the repeated use of motifs related to leather, boots, whips, and horses is so steeped in the tradition of phallic symbolism as well as allusions to sadomasochism, which evokes the whole pre-Freudian discourse of sexual "pathologies," that it is impossible to ignore. Secondly, if we take into account the original meaning of the term 'fetish' related to religious, animistic practices, and feminist, post-Freudian accounts of fetishism that complicate the Oedipal scheme with the reintroduction of this meaning as well as materiality and the senses, Barnes's fetishism as such begins to make sense as

61 Always typeset in the lower case.

62 The mother of the girls, however, is even more missing, but not missed, it seems; she is never mentioned in the "Madame" stories. Perhaps her place is successfully filled by the said Madame.

can be seen in the case of Dusie. As an animated magical talisman that has what Boscagli calls "performative power" to do things to the world and to the human subject, the fetishes-without-lack remain fetishes (Boscagli 2014, 50). The sexual content of the fetish is not erased in this process, but it does become more complex. The focus on the way the desired thing is used and enjoyed through the senses reveals a the agency of both the subjects *and* objects of fetishism, which is present in the religious context but lost in the sexological and psychoanalytical ones.

The dynamic between fetishism and the senses is strongly present in "A Night among the Horses," (1918, revised version 1962), a story that also lent its name to one of Barnes's published short story collections (1929). It is another story of a play of domination and submission between characters that come across as both fetishists and fetishized objects. The focal character, John describes Freda, the "lady of the house": "[...] that small fiery woman, with a battery for a heart and the body of a toy, who ran everything, who purred, saturated with impudence, with a mechanical buzz that ticked away her humanity" (*CS*, 249). Freda is unlike Dusie in that she is described as "small and fiery" instead of large and absent-minded. On the other hand, she is like Dusie in her resemblance to a nonhuman anthropomorphic fetish object, like a mechanical doll with a will (if not a mind) of its own: "She darted and bobbled about too much, and always with the mindless intensity of a mechanical toy kicking and raking about the floor" (*CS*, 252).

Freda has decided to "make a gentleman" out of John (*CS*, 249), who attempts to resist, but submits to a game of cat and mouse with sexual innuendoes. The game is played out through things such as Freda's "aggravating yellow veil," which according to John "stood for nothing but temptation" (Ibid.), and "objects of culture" like miniatures and ancient books with which she "torments" him (*CS*, 251). She also tempts him with imaginary tokens of phallic power:

> "You will rise to governor-general—well, to inspector"
> "Inspector!"
> "As you like, say master of the regiment—say cavalry officer. Horses, too, leather, whips—." (*CS*, 250)

Their interaction is referred to as "a game without any pleasure" in which both parties are debased and "on the wings of vertigo," which on the other hand does hint at pleasure (*CS*, 250). The whip is one of the objects that embodies simultaneous suffering and pleasure: the couple ride together, and John, angry at Freda's provocations, lashes at her boot with his whip. Because of this encounter between the materials of two fetish objects, Freda also appears as a thing: "the foot flew up in its stirrup, as though she were dancing. / And the little beast was delighted!" (*CS*, 249–250). A part of her body becomes independently animated, like that of a toy, but an animal-like pleasure is also introduced.

The vertigo-inducing mixture of torment and delight goes together with the two characters' ontological wavering between thing and human, object and subject. Freda sees her pursuit as a humanizing one: "I'll step you up from being a 'thing'. You will see, you will enjoy it" (*CS*, 249). John, on the other hand, doubts his future after their hypothetical affair, using the same word:

> He wouldn't fit in anywhere after Freda, he'd be neither what he was nor what he had been; he'd be a *thing*, half standing, half crouching, like those figures under the roofs of historic buildings, the halt position of the damned. (*CS*, 251, emphasis in the original)

In the game of power in which the characters of the story are involved, an ostler is a "thing," but so is an ex-ostler, not fit to his new role as a gentleman and perhaps abandoned by his gentlewoman. The liminal area between the two subject positions, in which John is caught, does not seem any better. Freda holds a masked ball in which she would like to have John take part as a human fetish object with his whips and boots: "Come [...] just as you are, and be our whipper-in," she suggests, which is taken by John as an "unpardonable insult" (*CS*, 253). Instead, John dresses in the conventional evening clothes of a gentleman, as a desperate gesture of independence. He cannot avoid standing out as a curious thing, however: "he was the only person present therefore who was not 'in dress', that is, in the accepted sense" (*CS*, 253). There is no way out: he would be thingified equally by his old clothes and the new costume.

At the same time, John is also shown to have feelings and sensory experiences that would not be attributed to a thing. The story begins and ends on the night of the masked ball, and in these scenes of the narrative present, descriptions of sense experience pertaining to the body and its surroundings complicate the possible ways of reading the character between human and thing. John has just escaped the ball, using his crudely phallic gentleman's cane as a magical item of protection; this event is narrated later in the story discourse: "He stepped free, and with the knob end of his cane, he drew a circle in the rosin clear around her, then backward went through the French windows" (*CS*, 254). The beginning of the story, narrating the result of his escape before moving to the events preceding it, is an inverse, parodic parade of symbols of masculine, upper-class power: "Toward dusk, in the summer of the year, a man in evening dress, carrying a top hat and a cane, crept on hands and knees through the underbrush bordering the pastures of the Buckler estate" (*CS*, 247).

However, the propositional image of "a man" quickly becomes an invitation to imagine an experiencing, embodied subject who feels pain in his wrists and whose drunkenly confused feelings of the shaking ground, his beating heart, and surrounding odors and lights the story evokes. As in Rhys's "Mannequin," readers are first given the character as an object solidified into an image and given spatio-temporal coordinates ("Twelve o'clock. Déjeuner chez Jeanne Veron, Place Vendôme," *LB*, 59; "Toward dusk…") which are then endowed with a rich inner life that resonates with its environment, by virtue of cues for embodied enactment of experience. The vividly depicted, intermingled textures of the underbrush and John's evening dress contribute to the reader's ability to imagine John as an experiencing subject rather than a fetish or a "thing": the scene suggests the tactile feel of grass, twigs and earth in his hands, and his knees covered by the fine fabric of the evening dress. The end of the story discourse finds him in the same situation, undecided between a desire to go back to his horses, and ambition to try and succeed as a gentleman. The horses, however, are free on the field, and fail to recognize John as he tries to wave at them. He is apparently destroyed as the horses trample him, which makes the story of power and seduction also a tragedy. The ending is made more powerful by the embodied experientiality suggested by the image of John in his formal attire crawling in the underbrush, which has the potential to lead to the reader's sensory imaginings, and an attribution of experience to the fictional body of John. Thus, the fictional materiality of this body, combined with its material surroundings makes him simultaneously a fetish and an experiencing subject.

In "The Grande Malade," the motif of boots contributes to a version of female fetishism where lack is replaced by excess. In "A Night among the Horses," both characters are simultaneously too much and not enough. Things have power over people, who see themselves in danger of becoming a thing, yet the way their contact with things is described in the stories potentially makes them feel more like experiencing subjects and lived bodies in the reader's imagination. This is akin to what Boscagli refers to as fetishism that "produces an erosion of the boundaries separating humans and objects," a practice where the *subject's own materiality* becomes molded by the object (Boscagli 2014, 53). An inversion is evident here, too, as it is the masculine gender that is exposed as masquerade, instead of the usual fetishized attire that accompanies the female body. However, the abundant richness of Barnes's short stories also encompasses forms of feminine masquerade, on which the next section will focus.

### 3.2.3. Laces, Corsets, and Furniture: The Case of the Madames

In the Freudian framework fetish qualities are applied to women's shoes and underwear metonymically, based on their proximity to an imaginary, absent phallus. The fetishization of certain items of women's clothing in general has already been pointed out by pre-Freudian sexologists., n his 1887 essay, "*Le fétichisme dans l'amour*," Alfred Binet cites several cases of "perverts" fetishizing women with certain types and items of clothing such as handkerchiefs and nightcaps, or wearing these items themselves. As Jann Matlock points out, even though Binet features fetishist women as well, his principal interest is in the ornamented adornment that women have "invented" and men desire, "the garb women can endow with fetishistic powers for men" (Matlock 1993, 39). By the end of the 19th century, there was a considerable difference between male and female dress: men had renounced flamboyant pieces of clothing, fabrics and colors, and shifted to more "rational" and simple, less colorful suits, while women in public still tended to be corseted, in long dresses and, depending on their socioeconomic position, heavily adorned. Parts of such dress have remained fetishist staples to this day.

Barnes also evokes something of a 19th century and *fin-de-siècle* style in her short fiction written a few decades later. Instead of featuring the non-corseted, short, sports-inspired gowns made popular at the time, her stories for the 1910s and 1920s hark to days of more complicated dress. This has to do with the texts' general tendency to intertextual evocations of the art and literature of the previous century, yet Barnes's way of dressing the characters is also an indicator of the discourses of 19th century and turn-of-the-century fetishism. Furthermore, it is known that Barnes frequented lesbian communities where cross-dressing was common, but she herself preferred to dress quite conservatively feminine, albeit in dramatic and impressive clothes (Caselli 2009, 27–34). Without explicit references to female cross-dressing, her fiction presents dress in general as a form of masquerade and artifice, as was apparent in the case of John's being simultaneously in dress and not in dress for the masked ball. The characters are paired with items of furniture as elaborately decorated as themselves, again suggesting their thing-likeness and artifice. However, as in the cases of the dolls, boots and items of male dress, the masquerade is always coupled with ways of evoking a sense of materiality and bodily feeling.

While in Barnes's work some of the masculinized items of clothing such as the boots above are worn by explicitly small women, the detailed description of feminine dress often accompanies a larger, older lady. However, both types of characters are endowed with an unmistakable aura of strength and power. Women referred to as "Madame" are present in Barnes's short fiction, not only as the anonymous listeners in the cycle of stories narrated by Katya, but also as actual characters. Their shared traits relating to fetishism and the trope of the phallic woman require a brief analysis of this pool of characters in conjunction with, although not going very deep into the storylines in which they figure.

Madame K— of "Dusie" is described as "large, very full and blond," with an aphoristic addition that "[s]he went with the furniture as only a childless Frenchwoman can" (*CS*, 405). We do not learn much about her dress, but her "going with the furniture" hints at something elaborate and abundant, these being the properties of the furniture in her house as described by Katya. In her salon, she embodies power as well as wit and reason, having kept from her days as a physician a capability to "remove" an argument "within the exact bounds of its sickness" (*CS*, 406). In "The Hatmaker" (1996)[63] the protagonist is also an independent professional living in a splendid house ("a sort of *Schönbrunn*," *CS*, 468). She is named simply Madame, and she runs not a salon but a hat maker's workshop with younger women as apprentices. She, like Madame K—, is linked to excess and plenty; her house is "filled" with "Louis Quinze chairs, Empire sofas, dolls, crazy jades, heavy Buddhas, and Roman busts" (Ibid.). As if explicitly playing with the definition of woman as negativity drawn by Freudian fetishism, the author writes that "[…] she could not write a letter that was understandable, being incapable of employing a negative in any sentence" (*CS*, 469). Both women are made thing-like by their parallelization with the furniture (and hats) with which they are surrounded, but at the same time they are shown to gain a talismanic power from these surroundings, *in addition* to seemingly being "filled" with power in several ways, thanks to a large or refined body (although we know of Madame in "The Hatmaker" only that she has been told "she resembled Récamier,[64] was a little like the Gioconda and had Early Italian bones," *CS*, 470), and an independent social status or even exact monetary worth, as in "The Hatmaker": "In the year nineteen hundred and thirty-two Madame was worth half a million dollars" (*CS*, 469).

The fetishized "objects of culture" and the intricate decorations of the houses in these two stories lend support to the bodies of the women like the whalebone in a corset. A similar pattern can be seen in "The Coward" (1917), although there is no explicit mention of a

63 The first publication of the story is in The *Collected Stories*.

64 Probably a reference to Juliette Récamier (1777–1849), who held literary salons in Paris at the beginning of the 19th century, yet it also evokes a piece of furniture, a *chaise lounge*, "the *Recamier*," that was named after her.

"Madame." In this story, Varra, the focal character, realizes the basis of her alleged courage:

> This reputation of hers had been built of the things the house was built of, the daily household sayings. It was in the atmosphere; it was a household quality, a something that had been given life by all these things that surrounded her, and she abruptly realized that it was with the household that she was trying to bury herself. (*CS*, 161)

Varra's power, her courage, rests on her house and the things in it, comprising both material things and "sayings," linguistic practices. Later in a difficult situation when her lover is arrested for theft, Varra wants to bury herself within all this. These things do not come across as clear fetish objects, but they have a similar function in the story: to enhance and support the character. Matlock cites Magnus Hirschfeld, a turn-of-the-century sexologist who claimed that "clothes make the body" (Matlock 1993, 40): clothing molds the form of the body that is visible in public.

In "Mother," Lydia Passova is given a name, but otherwise she too conforms to the Barnesian type of "Madame":

> Her long heavy head was divided by straight bound hair. Her high firm bust was made still higher and still firmer by German corsets. She was excessively tall, due to extraordinarily long legs. Her eyes were small, and not very focused. The left was slightly distended from the long use of a magnifying glass. (*CS*, 301)

Everything about Lydia, including the plentiful jewelry she owns and deals in (see Section 2.3.1) is high, tall, long, and multiple—with the exception of the eyes—they gain a metonymical relation to bigness through the magnifying glass (and one is physically bulged). The German corset adds firmness to the description. It carries an allusion to sturdy, German-made ware, and evokes the character as an embodied being imaginable by a reader, who is invited to enact the feeling of something tight around one's body. Further, in addition to the jewelry surrounding her in the pawnshop, she is made larger in contrast to her male lover, "a little nervous fellow" (*CS*, 302); this is also a recurring character type for Barnes.

In "Aller et Retour," the main character, Madame von Bartmann, is also "a woman of great strength" (*CS*, 362); she is large and heavily jeweled, and her "bosom was tightly cross-laced, the busk bending with every breath" (Ibid.). Her husband has just died, and she

describes him as a "queer, mad fellow" (*CS*, 367). The tight corseting of large, strong women as a repeating motif evokes femininity in several of its normative, material senses (parts of body and dress), but omits everything fragile and submissive as well as the idea of negativity and lack; these qualities are replaced with power and fullness. Barnes's corseted "madames" eat the cake and have it too. Madame von Bartmann's character actually blends the support of feminine undergarments and the phallic motif of boots: she wears "tan boots laced high on shapely legs" (*CS*, 362). Therefore, these stories and characters again point toward fetish objects, this time corsets and shoes, more as talismans of power than as a signifier of lack. There is still absence and lack in the stories, even the kind that in its slightly twisted and ambiguous way refers to the Oedipal family scheme. There is no mother present in "Mother," for instance; the lover's mother keeps sending him money, and Lydia is set as her present substitute, very real in her materiality. However, as in *Nightwood*, once again the *whole* woman is missing and has been replaced. If we interpret that she has been replaced by Lydia as a fetish offered to the reader (and to the little nervous lover, perhaps), there seems to be more than enough to fill the lack; the corseting also contributes to a sense of firmness and wholeness, or, in this case, *more-than-wholeness*, bulging and transgressing bodily boundaries. Thus, Lydia may well be a thing-like fetish, but thanks to the bodily, sensory experience described for readers to enact, she also emerges as an indicator of a lived body.

These examples show how Barnes's stories create their own brand of fetishism. It shares some characteristics with the "female fetishism" that Schor introduces in her essay on George Sand: the introduction of wounds to the realm of desire and the use of the thematic of the masquerade. It also highlights the dual dynamics of objectification between the fetish and the fetishist, which Apter calls for in her affirmative readings. However, there is *more* to it, literally. The repeated tropes of excess and abundance transform the fetishism in the stories from a fantasy and disavowal of lack to a fantasy of plenty, power, and wholeness, or even bulging excess. The negation of negativity is at the heart of Freudian fetishism, but in Barnes's hands this double negative becomes positive. The fetishized things—the corsets and boots, whips and dolls—are removed from the sphere of symbolic representation of the absent signified, and entered into a magical system of talismans. Finally, they are exposed in their materiality that is made available to the senses of the reader, constructing another kind of wholeness defining both fictional things and people.

## 3.3 Communities of Commodities

At the very end of "Mannequin," when Anna leaves the shop after a stressful day of presenting clothes, her exhaustion is replaced by a sense of being at home in another still image:

> At six o'clock Anna was out in the rue de la Paix; her fatigue forgotten, the feeling that now she really belonged to the great, maddening city possessed her and she was happy in her beautifully cut tailor made and a beret. (*LB*, 69)

As we have seen, Anna is a mannequin and a "type," and her job is to be used more or less as an inanimate dummy might be. However, here we have her feeling happy and as though she belongs. Are we to read the passage as wholly ironical, as a critical comment on a brief moment of bliss in the life of an underdog? Is the feeling itself produced by normative notions of femininity and consumership, or simply by the fetishist magic that has brought the dummy to life? From the previous discussions in this chapter, we can already infer that the case is slightly more complex.

In contrast to the historically evocative fashions of dress in Barnes's work, Rhys's is the world of uncorseted flappers and the "little black dress," the interwar invention of Coco Chanel. In terms of geographical place and historical time, the characters in Rhys's *Left Bank* live at the heart of fashion, but they are also marginalized, living precariously and with the continuing threat of losing the small privileges they may have secured. Her work also depicts fashion as a necessity and a strategy for survival, and directs criticism at the socioeconomic structures that create the need for independent women to fight for survival in the first place. Rhys's interwar novels and short stories often feature single women struggling to make a living and get out of economic difficulties with the limited means available to them. Mostly these consist of borrowing money from acquaintances, or finding precarious and quite poorly regarded jobs as mannequins,

artists' models, chorus girls, or tourist guides.[65] Amateur prostitution is sometimes hinted at, as an ultimate recourse, as in "Hunger": "Has she *means*? She has means. I have been a mannequin. I have been… No: not what you think…" (*LB*, 101; see Mulholland 2012, 455). All these "means" are shown to depend largely on relationships, which in turn depend on social skills, good looks, and the maintenance of a successful impression even in a desperate position. For this purpose, an array of gendered commodities including clothes, jewelry and make-up is needed.

It is a common trait in the legacy of historical materialism to pair the notion of reification with passivity and alienation, seeing the increase in purchasable material objects as parallel to an inability to belong or function as an agent in the sociocultural environment one inhabits. Georg Simmel (1903) links the abundance of goods to nervous overexertion, boredom, and a sense of rootlessness; twenty years later Georg Lukács combines Simmel's influence with historical materialism, stating that "reification" is "the necessary, immediate reality" of an inhabitant of a capitalist society (Lukács 1971a, 197; Brown 2013, 282). In this logic, as shown by Apter above, commodities have the power to make things out of people; perhaps not surprisingly, women seem to be especially at risk. Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*: "[…] not only does the woman of fashion project herself into things, she has chosen to make herself a thing" (Beauvoir 1953, 512).

In Rhys's work, this would be represented by a lonely woman clinging to her last personal belongings and looking for means to acquire more, drifting in an urban jungle where she ends up being at the mercy of other people—and things—in abusive relationships. Certainly, these are elements of Rhys's writing that have been targets of its social critique, and have been rightly exposed by researchers (see, for instance, Karagouni 2010; Maslen 2009; Britzolakis 2007; Zimring 2000; Le Gallez 1990). Paula Le Gallez, however, warns of equating the life and comments of the writer with her characters, as has often happened with Rhys, who herself has commented:

> I'm always being made into a victim… a passive person… but the fact is I was active. God knows I hardly think I should be copied in the way I lived my life and loves; but I didn't always make a mess of them, and I wasn't always the abandoned one, you know. (Devlin 1979, 114)

Rhys did not wish to be thought of as a victim, nor is it justifiable to see her characters merely as such. Le Gallez suggests that the "'Rhys woman' is passive only in a culturally determined way, and that underlying this attitude is an ironic awareness that the quality



65 Rhys herself worked in all these professions. Unlike Rhys, however, her heroines are rarely writers.

is actually part of the feminine condition in the society in which she lives" (Le Gallez 1990, 4). This is an important observation, but this study proposes going slightly further into investigating the alleged passivity of the characters, and its relation to the world of things, in an effort not to solidify the "feminine condition" as victimized more than the texts suggest. As in the discussion of fetishism, the analyses strive to remain open to all the readings the texts afford, including not only the negative and the problematic, but also the good and hopeful. In Rhys's case, as we began to see before in this chapter, it is especially the characters' depiction as lived bodies, feeling and sensing beings that can change the picture of the critical potential of the texts, too.

There is a risk involved in assuming that commodities related to women's fashion are somehow more artificial and more dehumanizing than other commodities. If one acknowledges the extent to which our everyday conception of humanity depends on clothing and other material things, one might find that the opposite is true. Maroula Joannou has successfully called to attention the ways in which Rhys's fiction evokes the sense of urgency involved in fashion: in Kaja Silverman's words, "clothing is a necessary condition of subjectivity" (Joannou 2012, 464; Silverman 1986, 147). As Joannou suggests, what makes Rhys different from her contemporaries writing on fashion and modernity, is "her refusal to divorce fashion from the feelings of the women who purchase and display it" (Joannou 2012, 486). This section asks, how the human characters in Rhys's stories are depicted as experiencing the owning and desiring of material things, and what positions are inscribed for the reader in relation to these human–thing communities introduced in the text. Things are not involved in these imaginary communities only as background props or symptoms of a society gone wrong. They *do things* also beyond fetishist fantasies of animation; they are participants in an assemblage that emerges between the human and nonhuman agents on the pages of the story and the embodied reader turning them.

### 3.3.1. Having Something of One's Own

Rhys's characters often regard other people with suspicion, as potential competitors or abusers. However, her work is also full of moments of intersubjective, emotional connection between different characters, and descriptions of circumstances that create a sense of belonging and ensuing happiness, often brief but very vivid, and almost always involving the vivid presence of material things. The things

are perhaps made livelier by the fact that they are scarce, as are the descriptive passages in most of the short stories in *The Left Bank*, but not only for stylistic reasons. In these stories, many of the characters are shown to hover above an abyss, the possibility of having nothing, and the prospect of eventually becoming nothing themselves. Therefore, when personal possessions are described, they stand out: a reader is invited to feel they are crucial to the story as well as the character to whom they are attributed.

As observed in Chapter 2, public and liminal spaces are more common loci than domestic ones in Rhys's work, and characters are often shown to inhabit other geographical locations than their home country. In the *Left Bank* stories set in Paris, the epithet "Anglo-Saxon" is repeated in association with many major and minor characters. It is synonymous with not quite fitting in Paris, being "down on her luck," "incongruous about the shoes," "a failure, a tragedy" (*LB*, 114, 54, 132). The focal characters are shown to be sensitive to the atmosphere of unhomeliness, and to look for something to help them to attain a feeling of belonging. In "La Grosse Fifi," the queerly motherly Fifi consoles the unhappy Roseau, who admits she is crying for a man. Fifi suggests graphically that she kick him out of her life: "...Put him at the door with a *coup de pied quelque part.*" (*LB,* 176). Roseau's response is typical of Rhys, combining tragedy and irony: "'But I haven't got a door', said Roseau in English, beginning to laugh hysterically. 'No vestige of a door I haven't—no door, no house, no friends, no money, no nothing'" (Ibid.). In "Illusion," Miss Bruce's principal problems, as interpreted by other characters, are both that she is in the hospital, and that she has none of her things with her: "Nothing at all, *pauvre* Mademoiselle," laments the cleaning lady in her boarding house (*LB*, 31); "she must at least have nightgowns and a comb and brush" (*LB*, 32). In Rhys's world, when in a predicament, what one first needs may well be the things closest to the body, the clothes and the equipment for maintaining (minimal) appearances. This is the basis from which one can meet and face up to other people and accept help; in T. S. Eliot's words, one needs to "prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet' (Eliot 1963, 3; cited in Joannou 2012, 478). For this need there are both obviously practical reasons, as well as ones related to magical thinking.

In the fields of anthropology and sociology, a type of interaction between human and nonhuman agents has been raised in the discussion of intersubjective sharing through inanimate objects, and the being-with-things always involved in intersubjective being-in-the-world (Lehtonen 2008; Miller 2008). In his anthropological study of the habitants of a London street, Daniel Miller proposes a bold pattern: the closer one's relations are with everyday objects like home decorations, the closer they are likely to be with people as well. Conversely, empty apartments correlate with lives empty of social contact and often empty of a sense of meaning (Miller 2008, 1.) Inanimate, material things that compose one's personal belongings, one's *stuff*, are part of an aesthetic order that communicates continuity of values, beliefs, and

relationships. Miller uses people's ways of being with their stuff and the sense of belonging as an argument against a received notion of modern alienated existence of individualities in a materialist society (Ibid., 286, 293). Even if we do not see a direct correlation between sociability and stuff, the homeless position of Rhys's characters might explain the way the descriptive focus of the stories rests on clothes and paraphernalia, not on interior items, for instance. As we saw in Section 2.3, they are the minimal container for a human being, and as discussed earlier in this chapter, they also often act as a protective armor or a lucky talisman. Clothes can also rarely be taken from one, even if everything else can. In the beginning of "Mannequin," Anna is shivering in a short "black cotton, chemise-like garment of the mannequin off duty" (*LB,* 59), while at the end she feels happy and at home in her own stylish clothes of good quality.

The texts create an opening for a sympathetic authorial audience, to whom such things are clear and meaningful. The embodied joy of wearing well-made clothes can be shared by readers quite broadly, as it appeals to the feelings of having clothes against one's body that are familiar to all people. As Marco Caracciolo argues, referring to the faculties of imagination employed in reading fiction, "If perception is embodied, then mental imagery must be embodied, too. [It is] deeply rooted in our real body and in memories of our past sensorimotor interaction with the environment" (Caracciolo 2014b, 160). Even though we tend to forget it, clothes are a constant companion in our "sensorimotor interactions with the environment"; they are unusual in their position of partly belonging to that environment, partly incorporated, as it were, to the sensing process and the body itself (see Colombetti 2016). This makes the evocation, even indirect, of such basic experience, an efficient way of engaging the reader in more complex, socioculturally colored experiences that like the sense of belonging, can also involve clothes. What Rhys's text invites readers to share is not only an ideology or an attitude toward things, or a socioculturally determined understanding of what it is like to own things, but also a sense of embodied being-in-the-world that accompanies these considerations.

### 3.3.2. Style, Taste, and Community

Rhys's short stories are not just about having one's own clothes and things, or not having them. Similarly, there is never a "pure" bodily instance of just the sensory experience of wearing clothes: the notions

of style, taste, and fashion always accompany such events. In Maurizia Boscagli's definition, style is "the way matter exists," what gives matter a semiotic and communicable dimension in human terms. Matter is always also culturally framed and defined, as are bodies that can sense it. All materiality is so drenched in style and aesthetics that it impossible to discuss it without them, yet style has not yet been a prominent feature in new materialist discourses (Boscagli 2014, 25). This is understandable given the desire to explore materiality apart from anthropocentric categories. However, Boscagli's suggestion merits some consideration. In Rhys's writing, style, taste, and fashion play a significant role.

Taste, if we follow Pierre Bourdieu, is a competency of relating to (among other things) the material reality acquired unconsciously through habituation to a certain environment (Bourdieu 1979). Fashion, then, could be defined as the commodified art of changing styles, which affects and is affected by taste (Wilson 2007, 3). Rhys's characters are influenced by fashions and have formulated their taste accordingly; what they see in individual (decorative) objects is either style and beauty, or the lack of them. Sharing a regard for some objects as delightful and good creates human groups and communities, and these objects are used to transfer emotions to other human beings; ideas of happiness are conveyed by a shared orientation toward "happy objects" (Ahmed 2010, 35).[66] In Rhys's fictional world, it seems important to many protagonists that they have beautiful, possibly expensive or at least not cheap-looking things, to get by in the consumer society; when this desire is paired with a constant lack of money, problems and even tragedies occur. However, this sort of taste is also a source of aesthetic pleasure in clothes and other things and creates an embodied sense of belonging, which cannot simply be read in the light of socioeconomic positions and relations.

The combination of economic necessity and aesthetic pleasure in relation to style and things is what makes it interesting to consider Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) as an intertext so far not explored for some of the stories in *The Left Bank*. In the American *belle époque*, Wharton's heroine Lily Bart leads a life more luxurious than any of Rhys's women, but it is still precarious. She alternates between skillfully managing her social position (finding a wealthy husband), and acting carelessly or rebelliously against it. She states: "A woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself. The clothes are the background, the frame, if you like: they don't make success, but they are a part of it." (Wharton 2000, 22.) However, besides a functional view of clothes as the frame of success, she is shown constantly enjoying the sensory qualities of beautiful surroundings, with a



66 The notion of happy objects will be explored more thoroughly in Section 4.1.1.

horror of everything "dingy."[67] Rhys's heroines are equally conscious of style and aesthetics related to commodity culture, which in the twenty years of time between the texts has become even more widely available. However, what is different is the way these commodities are "singularized," acting as more than a background or a frame (see Tischleder 2014, 25).

Just as having nothing of one's own against the skin is portrayed as tragic in *The Left Bank,* so is being bound to interiors that are bare or unpleasant. Rhys repeatedly uses words such as "empty" and "blank"[68] that are equivalent to Wharton's "dingy" to describe an unpleasant interior. As a narrative strategy, human beings can be thingified to form a part of the bleak environment: even the famous café *Le Dôme* is rendered unpleasant by "unpainted faces" that look "bald and unfinished," or the painted ones that are like "cruel stains in the sunlight," as in the story "The Blue Bird" (*LB*, 131). Conversely, even living-spaces that do not amount to a home, or commercial spaces that are public rather than private by definition, can become home-like if they contain homely or just aesthetically pleasing things, as was noticed in the previous chapter. This might still be ideologically in line with Miller's anthropological observations, but also introduce more possibilities: the space that enhances belonging need not be a privately-owned home, if it has "stuff" one cares for.

In "Mannequin", the splendid shop and showroom interiors are contrasted with the mannequins' "bare and cold" dressing room (*LB*, 61). Their lunch room, "the regions of utility and oilcloth" (*LB*, 63), is described as follows:

> She was in a big, very low-ceilinged room, all the floor space occupied by long wooden tables with no cloths... She was sitting at the mannequins' table, gazing at a thick and hideous white china plate, a twisted tin fork, a wooden-handled stained knife, a tumbler so thick it seemed unbreakable. (*LB*, 63)

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67 Dinginess seems to be a quality that threatens to take over her whole existence. The early comment, "Who wants a dingy woman?" points at the tragic inevitability with which Lily's life slips toward loss (Wharton 1990, 22). Babette Bärbel Tischleder (2014) thoroughly discusses inanimate things, taste, and aesthetics in *The House of Mirth.*

68 In *Good Morning, Midnight,* an oppressive employer, who is set to represent an entire patriarchal system, is called Mr. Blank, which emphasizes the negative meaning Rhys's work puts on the word.

Anna, the focalizer might be down-and-out, and lucky to get the place even "at an exceedingly small salary" as she remarks, (*LB,* 60), but this does not affect her taste: we see her gazing at the hideous tableware in almost comical disbelief. Nevertheless, she calls getting the job as mannequin, with a dose of irony, "this dazzling, this incredible opportunity" that she thinks she owes to her legs (*LB,* 59). Anna is shown wavering between a clear sense of taste combined with a sense of self-worth, and a tendency toward ironic self-thingification.

The co-dependency of self-respect, economic position and style is a recurring theme in the collection. The thematic is verbalized in "Discourse of a Lady Standing a Dinner to a Down-And- Out Friend," in the "Lady's" thoughts, presented in parentheses between her lines of speech (the story consists entirely of the alternation of the two): "A woman supposed to be starving ought not to go about in silk stockings and quite expensive shoes" (*LB,* 105). The "down-and-out" woman's responses are not included in the story discourse, but it is evident that the readers' sympathies are invited to reside with her. The story indeed seems to promote the dignity of the underdog, and a look at the practical side of aesthetics: it was not probable to make money by selling one's stockings or shoes,[69] but keeping up appearances might help in securing a more stable income. The "Lady" of the story is shown to contradict herself in disapproving of her friend's looks and alleged loose manners, but covertly wondering, why she does not use them to extract money from men (presented with ellipses, like most of Rhys's references to prostitution): "[...] these people with not enough to eat. You can't trust them with *men*..."; "And there is that man opposite making eyes at her. Quite a good-looking man. Well, if she is that sort... Well, why *doesn't* she?" (*LB,* 106–107, emphasis in the original). What is more, the reader has no access to what the down-and-out friend thinks about style or how she feels within her clothes, but it is quite intuitive, by virtue of experiential knowledge of different materials, for a reader to imagine that it *feels* better to have silk stockings and "expensive" shoes, regardless of their potential contribution to socioeconomic mobility.

In this story, it is made clear that feelings of fellowship are absent between the two women. In "Mannequin," the lunch scene of the typified models has much the same effect. However, what is intriguing is that Anna's sense of being surrounded by mannequin dummies instead of people is most strongly present in the shabby lunch room, where she is also surrounded by aesthetically unpleasant objects and dressed in her uniform-like cotton chemise. In the showroom with "white and gold walls," "staring at a marvelous nightgown," she feels exhausted, but is comforted by a friendly saleswoman, who grasps her feeling of pointlessness, but encourages her to go on (*LB,* 69). The ending, quoted at the beginning of this section, again marks

69 "You cannot get any money for women's clothes in Paris," complains the narrator of "Hunger" (*LB*, 100). See also, Joannou 2012, 486.

a sense of belonging. I suggest that the tailor-made suit and beret in this scene are something essential for the sense of belonging and a sense of agency contrary to the notion of objectification as alienation. Anna's feelings are clearly brought about jointly by the clothes and by having a place to work and a community to work with, even if it is a community of doll-like "types." Joannou sees "Mannequin" as an "acerbic commentary upon alienated female labour" (Joannou 2012, 482), which it doubtless is; its belonging is of a normative nature and can be seen as restrictive and objectifying. Yet the *feeling of belonging* it evokes invites the reader to conceive of Anna as a feeling subject, not as an object.

In "Tea with an Artist," a sense of belonging is similarly built on everyday things. The narrator meets a Dutch painter called Verhausen in a Paris café. When she goes to Verhausen's studio to look at his paintings, a tea table is set for the two. Unlike in "Mannequin," the setting enables a sense of belonging and a sort of understanding between two human characters. The style of the table is the opposite of the mannequins' lunch room: "On the table was spread a white cloth and there were blue cups and saucers and a plate of gingerbread cut into slices and thickly buttered" (*LB,* 76). There *is* a tablecloth, the tableware is not "hideous," and even butter has not been spared. On the wall, a collection of smoking pipes make the room "Dutchly homely" (*LB,* 77).[70] The hominess of the setting is also enhanced by language: the painter announces in "astonishingly good English" that he has made English tea because "[t]wo cups of tea all English must have before they contemplate works of art" (*LB,* 77). The narrator seems to be at ease, and describes the artist's personality as "comfortable and comforting" (Ibid.). The reader is invited to imagine the tokens of "Englishness" and Dutch homeliness in an artist studio in Paris, and react to them either by sharing the feeling of belonging, or possibly being amused by this description of precarious belonging, with a hint of pity for the characters. I would argue that both readerly positions are likely, and can even exist simultaneously, in relation to Rhys's text. The comfort and happiness depicted are acutely imaginable, but there is always also an ironic dimension that actually exposes the normative dimensions of the characters' taste in "happy objects": they indulge in a moment of conservative, Northern-European bourgeois comfort in the middle

70 The pipe is a masculine or phallic object that probably already in the 1920's carried connotations of tradition, rural culture or indigenous peoples, in contrast to the urban, modern and feminine cigarette (Connor 2013, 156).

of bohemian Paris, both quite apparently in a socioeconomically unstable situation and far from the ideal toward which they seem to momentarily orient themselves.

"Tea with an Artist" is followed by the three stories set in the Caribbean islands ("Trio," "Mixing Cocktails," and "Again the Antilles"), which also convey a sense of hominess and a description of settings slightly different from the rest of the collection. This sequence of themes is repeated in the 1939 novel *Good Morning, Midnight*, in which a visit to a primitivist painter's studio in Paris causes Sasha to remember vaguely an image of a Caribbean past and feel safe enough to cry. Sasha too has tea with the artist, although the room is less cozy and the encounter eventually less direct, more business-like than Sasha had perhaps hoped. Nevertheless, the connection with the Caribbean context, which often represents a lost home in Rhys's work, is achieved in these stories not only through objects of art (in *Good Morning, Midnight,* paintings, masks and *béguine* music), but also through the sense of home bound to material detail, home decorations and food. Similarly, in "Mixing Cocktails, the cocktails create a link between with the *Left Bank* stories set in Paris restaurants with their cocktail offerings.

From the fragments analyzed above, it is clear that that inanimate things are present, and even necessary, also in human-human encounters in the stories. I would like to emphasize the sense of necessity that surrounds objects of style that are considered excessive and luxurious. By condemning such feelings as part of the lures of the commodity fetish, one would risk demonizing and trivializing a feminine sphere of life. Rhys's writing participates in social criticism too, by depicting the urgency of a cultural context, which is moving away from the rigorous world of Wharton's *The House of Mirth,* but still carries some of its values and customs. To make it in the social reality, a woman must succumb to a certain amount of reification of human relations. However, it is not the stylish clothes and things that thingify the woman. Rather, they make it possible for her to be counted as human in this context and join a community. This is in no way an exclusively feminine requirement; Verhausen is "humanized" by his "Dutchly-homely" tableware and pipes just as much as Anna in "Mannequin" is by her "tailor made and a beret." They are humanized both in the sense of shared normative understanding of style and taste, and the embodied feeling of the things that can be shared between people. Besides being vehicles for social requirements, commodities as meaningful but material things are also sources of embodied feelings of pleasure, which then connect to more cognitively conceptualizable states of belonging and happiness and their sociocultural connotations, which will be further explored in Chapter 4. Through things, the characters are constructed as experiencing subjects and agents. The final sections of this chapter turn from communities to constellations, exploring nonhuman agencies beyond fetishism and even beyond human relations as they appear in Djuna Barnes's work.

## 3.4 Entanglements of Humans and Things

> The scene is set but seems the actor gone.
>
> — Djuna Barnes: *Antiphon*[71]

In "Dusie," the bodies of the characters are surrounded by elaborately described things. In fact, the mode of the story, like most of Barnes's stories, is descriptive. The excerpts below are only approximately half of the descriptive passage dedicated to Madame's house, in a story that is less than eight pages long:

> The house was very French. All gold and blue, and, in the boudoirs, pink. There were three, but the part of the house I saw most often was blue and white, with much lace and gold. The walls were blue satin, and hanging from tasselled cords were many golden framed women hung. [...]
>
> There were many chrysanthemums, and a long white harp in the embrasure of the window, and in the dust lying upon it many women had written "Dusie." And above all, in an enamelled cage, two canaries, the one who sang, and the one who listened.
>
> But in the boudoirs there was much pink, and everything was brittle and glazed and intricate. Ribbons dangled from everything and bon-bons were everywhere, and statuettes of little boys in satin breeches, offering tiny ladies in bouffant skirts, fans and finches and flowers, and all about in the grass were stuck shiny slinking foxes. (*CS*, 404–405)

71 Barnes 1958, 8.

A list-like description such as this one conveys both the importance of detail and a sense of the whole, which according to Julie Taylor is what makes Barnes's writing enjoyable: "Not to pay attention to the particular *things* is to miss out on most of the pleasure, but the nature of abundance conveyed by the list as a whole is equally important" (Taylor 2012, 156, emphasis in the original). The repetition of certain quantifying and qualifying words in the list of this passage extends to a spectacle of plenteousness ad absurdum: "many chrysanthemums," "many women," "much pink," "long harp"; "everything," "everywhere," and "all about." The material luxury depicted does not come across as the reverse to a lack or a loss in some other domain. There is pain, too, in the triangle drama that results in the crushed foot, later in the story, but all this is presented rather as part of the excess than as its balancing other. The description of the house bulges with luxurious materiality, which becomes more *stuff* than things: a mass of matter in the unstable state of becoming (see Boscagli 2014, 14). The choices of words according to which there is so *much* of *everything* cause the contents of the house to swell beyond its limits.

Katya, the narrator, also describes Dusie and Madame K—, along with other women present in the house. However, the most extensive and vivid descriptions are devoted to the things surrounding them, and they also come before the characters in the discourse of the story. This is not quite a standard procedure of building up characters with the help of their surroundings, because the abundance of the preceding descriptions of environment and things all but swallows up the character. The form of Barnes's descriptions and her employment of detail will be the main topic of discussion in Section 5.2. In this chapter, "Dusie" and other texts sharing these features are discussed from the point of view of agency and the wavering distinctions between human and nonhuman bodies. The suggestion is that the stories invite a reading in which agency is *distributed* between the human and the nonhuman, even more strongly than in Rhys's fiction, and that this new materialist conception of agency contributes to the subsequent analyses of affectivity and meaning-making.

In "Dusie," agency appears as a constellation of human and nonhuman elements, and idea that can be supported by new materialist thinking. According to Karen Barad, the habitual way of conceiving of individual agency is inadequate. Instead, she suggests that agency emerges in constellations involving more than one party, out of which any number can also be nonhuman and even ones that can be considered inanimate. Agents not only interact in these constellations, what she calls "phenomena"; they themselves are also constituted in and through them: "agencies are only distinct

in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individualelements" (Barad 2007, 33, emphasis in the original).[72]

Such a formulation calls for a question: if I am to follow this line of thought, then how do I justify all the talk of things? Following the observations in cognitive sciences and phenomenology on which this study is built, while living in a world of such entangled agencies, humans still tend to experience the world as divided into things, even if physically considered they were made of innumerable micro-agencies. A table, a book, and a building appear as separate *things* with their specific affordances as do more abstract entities such as "the government" or "the university," or even other people, as bodies occupying space.

Barad, drawing on and developing the natural sciences, has an alternative point of view to offer researchers of human activities and institutions, and this study takes up the challenge offered by the theory of agencies as profoundly entangled and emerging in what Barad calls "intra-action" (Barad 2007, 33).[73] Barnes's texts are largely constructed in and for a world made of discernible *things*, human and nonhuman. It is possible to simultaneously take the cognitive-phenomenological perspective to things as they are experienced, but also be aware of the possibility to think differently, and remain open to instances where the experience actually supports a more intra-active, entangled interpretation instead of a neat division into things as separate agents.

Considering the experiential participation of the reader into these phenomena gives reason to foreground the role of *affectivity* in distributed agency, in the manner of Jane Bennett (2010). Bennett's notion of "vibrant matter" conceives of agency, following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2013), in *assemblages*, "confederation[s] of human and nonhuman elements," in which the force of the confederation is more than the sum of its parts, although the parts need not be completely constituted by one another, as in Barad's account (Bennett 2010, 23, 21):

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72 At the background of this view, also influenced by Latour's actor network theory, are empirical findings in the field of quantum physics. However, Barad shows how the approach is applicable to a wide array of philosophical questions, including ones pertaining to society, ethics, art, and literature. The entangled phenomena she is referring to are mixtures of what we might habitually call material and cultural; in this vein of thinking, the distinction may cease to matter. Barad emphasizes the importance of nonhumans in distributive agency (Barad 2007: 32), yet she also specifies that the use of the term 'posthumanism' in denoting a "posthumanist performative account" "marks a refusal to take the distinction between 'human' and 'nonhuman' for granted" (Ibid.), a will to see them as profoundly entangled, and to investigate the very practices in which these poles are enacted (Ibid., 139).

73 As distinctive of interaction, which would imply the previous independent existence of the agents.

> Assemblages are not governed by any central head: no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group. The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen [...] is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone. (Ibid., 24)

An assemblage such as the combination of the things and human characters in the descriptive sections of "Dusie" gains its potential to affect—in this case, the reader—through the grouping of the different material agents. The force of this argument lies, firstly, on the deconstruction of the boundary between matter and life. It enables looking at humans as well as nonhumans and things as simultaneously material and potentially animate bodies. To address the agential potential in nonhuman existents in a text, we thus need not limit our scope to instances of personification, fetishization, or even community-building. Secondly, the notion of the affective body as a party in the emergence of agency is a fruitful one for the reading of fictional texts, as it enters into dialogue with the embodied cognitive approaches to reading and narrative referred to in this study.

This chapter will first illustrate the agency of material things and their co-operation with character-descriptions, and then discuss the ways Barnes's characters, often verging on nonhuman themselves, figure in these assemblages. The aim is to offer ways of reading Barnes's fiction that would recognize the thing-like in humans and the agency of things, and simultaneously shed light on the appeal that both have for readers, leading toward the more detailed discussion of affectivity in the following chapter.[74]

### 3.4.1. Things as Fictional Agents

In the passage from "Dusie," there are multiple human elements present, beginning from the fact that most of the things are human-made and infused with human culture and style. We recognize rococo elements in the color scheme and in the anthropomorphic statuettes of boys in breeches and tiny ladies; there are paintings described as "golden women," and even the intrusion of the character, Dusie, in the way her name is written in the dust on the surface of the harp. The whole is observed through the human eyes of Katya. The house encompasses all these things, the boudoirs afford dreams and encounters, the dust makes up the words, the statuettes seem to be engaged



74 The analyses in the following two sections, with the exception of those related to "Dusie," are based on observations published in an article in *On_Culture* 2 (Oulanne 2016).

in a completely independent activity, while adding their ambiguous gestures to the total "phenomenon" of the house. On the level of reader-text interaction, the materialities of language participate in the action: the form of the list of items linked with commas and conjunctions creates a sense of plenty, while the synesthetic potential of words such as "bon-bons," "glazed," and "brittle," as well as the sense of accumulation evoked by the repetition of "many," invites an embodied, schematic understanding of the abundance of things. The words on the page give the impression of having gathered[75] there to make up the plenitude of fictional things gathered in the fictional house.

Additionally, the length and the position of the description of materialities in the narrative discourse is worth noticing: it appears before the detailed description of either of the main characters, although their names have been mentioned. The things are presented as though it was they who made up the action of the story, and they interrupt the flow of readerly interest in the direction of characters and events: what are Madame K— and Dusie like? What is going to happen to them? We can imagine these questions more vividly because of the inclusion of "Madame" as the listener of the story in the fictional world. Instead, however, Katya's narrating voice provides a flood of decorative objects small and large, along with pets, dust, furniture, and fabrics, which continues long enough to leave a multisensory impression on the reading mind. The description constitutes a fictional assemblage with the power to affect a reader, in addition to the more ambiguous power the things seem to have in the fictional world, engaged in a gathering all their own, where characters are invited only as quick references.

How does such an effect of things act as a constellation created in readers? Bennett writes of an experience of being "struck" by a random arrangement of debris she encounters on a Baltimore street:

> In the second moment, stuff exhibited its thing-power: it issued a call, even if I did not quite understand what it was saying. At the very least, it provoked affects in me: I was repelled by the dead (or was it merely sleeping?) rat and dismayed by the litter, but I also felt something else: a nameless awareness of the impossible singularity of that rat, that configuration of pollen, that otherwise utterly banal, mass-produced plastic water bottle-cap. (Bennett 2010, 4)

75 As Bill Brown (2016, 29) notes, the Germanic origin of the words "thing" and "ding" refers to a gathering, a political assembly.

We could argue that the fictional assemblages of objects, such as the ones described in "Dusie", are capable of setting the stage for "enchantment" and fictional encounters phenomenologically resembling the one described by Bennett. Such passages consist of deictic gestures offering the reader a specific array of things: "*that*" cage, those canaries, tassels, chrysanthemums, and statuettes. In providing a thing as a fictionalized focus of attention, they have the capability to defamiliarize and thereby make the things tangible and, paradoxically, more real (see Shklovsky 2004). In Bennett's description, the things are not animated or personified, but they have a *capacity to affect*: "the figure of enchantment points in two directions: the first toward the humans who *feel* enchanted and whose agentic capacities may be thereby strengthened, and the second toward the agency of the things that *produce* (helpful, harmful) effects in human and other bodies" (Bennett 2010, xii).

As she is the human narrator of the passage, Katya's body yields itself as a proxy, to align the reader's "virtual" bodily experience with. However, a human body in the fictional world is not required for the production of such experientiality. In instances that can be called "figuralization," an "empty deictic center" in a passage without a character experiencer is filled by readerly immersion (Banfield 1987, 273; Fludernik 1996, 192–207). Therefore, it can be argued that a text implies a human subject and thereby a lived body even if one is not explicitly mentioned. This was mentioned in Chapter 2 with reference to the use of light as a proxy for focalization, even in the presence of a character. "Finale" (1918), for instance, is a two-page story narrated extradiegetically and focalized by an empty deictic center; the focus roams around a room at the center of which lies a dead man in a coffin, surrounded by candles and mourners. Clearly, there is no "lived" body inviting projection or attribution of experience: "Everything else in the room seemed willing to go on changing—being. He alone remained cold and unwilling, like a stoppage in the atmosphere" (*CS*, 232).

The focalization of "Finale" contributes to the ambiguity of the story in relation to the bodies presented: the categories of animate/lived and inanimate, passive, and active do not coincide neatly with those of the human and the nonhuman. The dead body seems "cold and unwilling," but physically speaking it certainly is "changing" and "being" in its way: the biological processes of its decomposition must already be in action. Around the dead man, the human and nonhuman elements in the room, all included under the scope of "everything," are still living. There are the kneeling bodies of his wife, mother, and children, explicitly lived; we learn from the narrator of the

mother's weeping, the girl's damp palms, the boy's private, pleasurable memory of rubbing his head against a nurse's arm. There are also burning candles, and in the corner, "the dead man's dearest possession: a bright blue scarf embroidered with spots of gold" (*CS*, 233). The scarf has been acquired during a brief romantic encounter in Italy. It has a history of experientiality in sensory contact with the man's once-lived body: "It was a lovely thing, but much treasuring had lined it; and the marks of his thumbs as they passed over it in pleasant satisfaction had left their tarnish on the little spots of gold" (Ibid.).

After this description of the room, the narration marks the passing of time by introducing growing shadows. The end of the story moves from stagnation to action, but with a nonhuman agent:

> A large rat put his head out of a hole, long dusty, and peered into the room.
>
> The children were going to rise and go to bed soon. The bodies of the mourners had that half-sorrowful, half-bored look of people who do something that hurts too long.
>
> Presently the rat took hold of the scarf and trotted away with it into the darkness of the beyond.
>
> One thing only had the undertaker forgotten to do; he had failed to remove the cotton from the ears of the dead man, who had suffered from earache. (Ibid.)

In this story, the form of the human body is not clearly present in a focalizer's fictional body, but the room is full of more and less thing-like bodies that still invite experientiality. The characters are emphasized as bodies in postures, which arguably invite readers to resonate experientially with their briefly narrated personal experiences, and by a general reference at the end, with what it is like to "do something that hurts too long." In the description of the scarf, a clear opening for a reader's enactment of bodily experience comes in the reference to the man's thumbs having touched it. Traces of human agency and experience become entangled with nonhuman elements: the rat is the most vivid, fast-moving agent in the story, while the scarf is described in the liveliest manner. The human bodies are all silent and thing-like except for their briefly narrated experiences of grief, while the corpse keeps changing its own, invisible way. The last sentence of the story returns from the entrance and exit of the rat to the slow rhythm of description, the changing and being of bodies. It foregrounds the contrast between a live and a dead body by pointing to the pointlessness of the cotton in the ears of a dead man, which are no longer capable of hearing nor hurting; paradoxically, the mention of earache may be enough for the activation of some readers' bodily memory of such an experience.

No character in the fictional world of "Finale" is shown to recognize these goings-on between the human and nonhuman: the scarf steeped in experientiality and the rat, or the cotton in the ear. The scarf has been held dear and caressed, but is now forgotten; the once helpful, now out-of-place cotton is ignored, making a part of the body-turned-nonhuman of the dead man. I suggest that these encounters, revealed by the narrator of the story as if behind the backs of the mourners, are crucial for the story's potential to strike and enchant the reader. The rat, unlike the one in Bennett's description, is a very lively one, but also the scarf has some vividness both in its color and its having attracted the dead man as well as the rat; = most importantly, it is described so vividly as to leave a mark on the reader as well. Solicitations of sensory experience in the story are not reducible to the human fictionally actual bodies, but arise between them and the nonhuman ones. Furthermore, were there no descriptions of or hints toward experience, readers would be able to project them to the description of the scarf, for instance: an introduction of a scarf in a story at least evokes a sense of how it feels to wear one.

As shown by the analyses above, readerly capacity to be affected by a story reaches beyond representations of human bodies and experience. Readers respond to fictional things, firstly, because they have their own experience of sensing and otherwise dealing with actual things, being-in-the-world as three-dimensional bodies themselves. They do not read descriptions of material detail passively, waiting for the human agent to come along. The experience of agency in the stories emerges in the affective assemblage of fictional elements, both human and nonhuman, in their materiality, grasped in the materialities of language by material readers in a lived body, all molded by the very experience of the phenomenon of reading. The stories experiment with techniques where the representation of human experience is delayed or removed, but they still invite readers to draw on their experiential background, a reservoir of experience of life shared with things like those presented in the stories. This does not mean they need the actual experience of completely "similar" things: the stories give cues for basic, bodily experience in the ways they point out the materials, textures and colors of the items.

### 3.4.2. Characters as Thing-like Agents

Djuna Barnes's characters often challenge interpreters with their caricature-like impenetrability. This will be the topic of more detailed discussion in the context of affects and emotions in Chapter 4.2, while this chapter focuses on the thing-like sides of the characters from the point of view of agency, which is already closely linked with affectivity. Barnes's characters have often been likened to animals, (see Taylor 2008; Rohman 2009, 2007). The most often-mentioned example

of such characters is Robin Vote, the elusive and deceptive lover in *Nightwood*, who is cited here as an example of a type of character also present in Barnes's short stories. According to Carrie Rohman (2007, 131), Robin "figures nonidentity as a form of subjectivity, where the nonlinguistic, the undecidable, and the animal serve to revise what counts as human." Clare Taylor sees Robin as the manifestation of a fantasy of wholeness that *Nightwood* shows to be destructive (Taylor 2003, 168–169). is introduced in the novel when she is seen by her future husband Felix Volkbein and doctor Matthew O'Connor, lying unconscious on the bed in a luxurious hotel room. As Rohman points out, the passage evokes a sense of smell, which locates Robin in the "realm of animality" (2007, 66): she is said to exude an odor with a "quality of that earth-flesh, fungi [...] texture of plant life" (*N*, 31).

Other features in the passage point toward the "realm" of nonhuman things, which also have consequences for how readers are invited to imagine Robin. The narration of the story takes its time before reaching Robin's body, passing first by way of a carpet, two windows and several furnishings and decorations:

> On a bed, surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers, faintly oversung by the notes of unseen birds, which seemed to have been forgotten—left without the usual silencing cover, which, like cloaks on funeral urns, are cast over their cages at night by good housewives—half flung off the support of the cushions from which, in a moment of threatened consciousness she had turned her head, lay the young woman, heavy and disheveled. (*N*, 30–31)

As in "Dusie," the narrating voice of *Nightwood* seems to lose itself in details of things, plants, fabrics and birds in cages, evoked in a multisensory manner (the birds, for instance, are not seen but heard, and afterwards also Robin's smell is mentioned). The result is a *tableau vivant* that could be a parody of "The Sleeping Beauty." The scene is also compared to a painting by Henri Rousseau (1844–1919) and thereby to a jungle, where human and nonhuman agencies are further mixed: "she seemed to lie in a jungle trapped in a drawing room (in the apprehension of which the walls have made their escape), thrown in among the carnivorous flowers as their ration [...]" (*N*, 31). The picture features the figure of a female human being, but the sheer amount of sensory information from nonhuman elements in general overrides (and "oversings") the human form.

Similar patterns of character presentation emerge in many of Barnes's stories. In "A Boy Asks a Question" (1923), Carmen la Tosca is a famous actress spending her holiday in a village. The main event of the short narrative occurs when a neighborhood boy of fourteen

approaches Carmen, a well-known "woman of the world" *(CS,* 346), with a question vaguely related to the nature of love. The resulting discussion is equally ambiguous, and the aesthetic focus of the story is, again, rather on a spatial *tableau* than on temporally organized action. Like Robin, and like Dusie at the end of her story, Carmen is a pictured in bed, surrounded by a multitude of materialities:

> Carmen la Tosca breakfasted in bed, and late. Having caught herself out of sleep in a net of bobbin-lace, she broke fast with both food and scent, lazily dusting her neck and arms with perfumed talc, lolling on the bed (which stood between two ovals of pear-wood, framing versions of Leda and the swan), ripping through the wrappers of Puerto Rican journals and French gazettes with the blade of a murderous paper-cutter, and finally, in the total vacancy of complete indulgence, her hand sprawling across a screaming headline, would stare out into the harsh economy of russet boughs, pranked out in fruit. (*CS*, 346–347)

Carmen, too, is surrounded by fabrics, furniture, art, small objects, and plants. The structures of agency suggested by the verb forms of the passage are ambiguous: Carmen has "caught herself out of sleep," in a net of lace, whose way of participating in the action is not specified. This description evokes the sense of smell like the one from *Nightwood*, but it also introduces sounds that foreground the very materiality of the words of the passage as well as the things and actions they denote: there is "ripping through the wrappers" and a "screaming headline."

In "A Boy Asks a Question," as in *Nightwood* and "Dusie," the description of the surrounding space does not simply support the construction of the character around whom all the things are gathered. They may appear as more vivid than the character itself, and override the human agent by their sheer volume, and thereby have more potential for affective agency in relation to the reader. On the other hand, it is the body of the character and the thing-bodies together that make the vivid *tableau*. The richness of different materials invites the reader's bodily, sensory imagination, and the human body among the things, while providing itself as a lived body, is also a thing-like body with a virtually imaginable surface and dimensions, occupying space. None of these bodies in Barnes's assemblages needs to be seen as an agent in itself; it is the whole that makes up the *tableau* at the center of the story.

In a stagnant scene like this, the thing-likeness of human elements is more plausible, yet even characters who are presented as more "animated" and perform actions in Barnes's fiction, retain a close relationship with the nonhuman. In *Nightwood*, as Robin wakes up, rises from the bed and begins to move about in the fictional world, she never sheds the sense of being a mixture of human, animal and

thing. She drifts from marriage with Felix to childbirth and alienation from both, and further into a relationship with Nora Flood, which does not stop her drifting. Her actions are not involuntary, but rather their motivations are kept a mystery from the readers, and thereby she remains pronouncedly a body occupying space, a surface. At the end of the novel, after another period of absence, Nora and her dog find Robin in an abandoned chapel. She begins miming the dog, falling to the floor, barking, and crying; this scene has puzzled scholars. Here, too, the "surface" level of Robin's action may be more important than the psychology behind it. Barnes herself has commented: "I do not go any further than this into the psychology of the 'animal' in Robin because it seems to me that the very act with the dog is pointed enough" (Barnes, letter to Coleman 11 July 1935). Such unreadability of characters and its relationship to affectivity and gestures will be discussed further throughout the following chapters. As *affective* agents, Robin, Carmen, as well as the women of "Dusie" and the lived bodies of "Finale," are characters the reader follows and experiences virtually as lived bodies, even though they are foregrounded as thing-like. Applying embodied cognitive approaches to narrative study suggests that the structures of focalization and readerly projection can be what takes readers beyond the clear-cut human/nonhuman divide. The imaginary experientiality of the characters emerges in the phenomenon of reading together with readerly reactions to the characters chiefly *as bodies*, a condition they share with the nonhuman things surrounding them.

The discussions of this chapter have shown how human and nonhuman fictional agencies are entangled in Rhys's and Barnes's fiction. They range from the ambiguous power relations in fetishism to the interaction of humans and things in communities, and in affective assemblages that involve the reader: a body simultaneously human and thing-like herself. As Bennett describes her work: "One moral of the story is that we are also nonhuman and that things, too, are vital players in the world" (Bennett 2010, 4). The experience of reading fiction is dependent on material, nonhuman agencies as well as human ones; the two also share several traits, and readers are capable of seeing both as expressive, be it through magical animation with the help of literary devices, or simply something they have been accustomed to thinking of as mere 'stuff' surrounding the allegedly meaningful characters and events of a story. The following chapter will ask more detailed questions about how this 'stuff is conceived of as expressive, and how it can affect readers.

# Affective Things

# 4 Affective Things

> It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to things, inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus [...] as for oneself.
>
> — Virginia Woolf: *To the Lighthouse*[76]

Human beings "feel" material things via the sense of touch, along with other senses. We also have *feelings for* them; we are *touched by* them. Barnes and Rhys show characters experiencing recognizable emotions such as desire, fear, anxiety, happiness and contentment accompanied by a concrete feeling of a material thing, and sometimes clearly directed toward such a thing. In other cases, it seems that the things, along with the human characters' bodies, have the role of *expressing* an emotion, mood or ambience. Even more often, a single emotion or mood is not identifiable, but the reading of the stories nevertheless gives a sense that the things participate in general affective shifts. Besides, there are also characters, like the ones encountered in the previous chapter, who somehow resemble things: flat characters, impenetrable minds, and bodies moving in mysterious ways. Nevertheless, readers are capable of feeling for and with them, too.

Feeling for and being touched by material things is not easily expressed in the language of literary studies. Emotions tend to be attributed to readers, characters and possibly implied authors. Things are there for support, projection and mediation: like in the passage by Woolf quoted above, they are leant to "if one was alone" and felt for "as for oneself," as surrogates for human contact and self-reflection. Nevertheless, we do have feelings for inanimate things, even fictional ones that appear on the pages of a book, directly without mere human interest, even while our being human affects our reading and the ways we subsequently interpret these feelings. "What a lovely dress; soft cushion; dull room; scary dark alley; funny hat!" Such slight affective evaluations in the reader make up a great part of the reading of a story. The "affective turn" in the humanities has resulted in heightened attention to the body and emotions, and new syntheses between body and mind, reason and passion (Clough 2007, 1). Affect and emotion have gained visibility in the field of literary studies as well. Patrick Colm Hogan (2011) suggests that the structures (events and actions, plots and



76 1927, p. 53.

even genres) of narratives are profoundly shaped by how our emotions work; Jenefer Robinson (2005) argues that unconscious, affective appraisals guide our reception of literature and art and are necessary for the understanding of some works of fiction.

modernist literary works often associate inanimate things with feelings. In a strict sense of high modernist poetics, they can act as a manifestation of the *objective correlative* of T. S. Eliot, symbolic images that provide access to an emotion by *showing* rather than *telling*. The quotation from *To the Lighthouse* provides us with various other roles things might have, especially when it comes to prose fiction. In Woolf's fiction, as well as in Jean Rhys' and Djuna Barnes's, even more obviously thing-like things than streams and flowers, such as shoes, dresses, books, chairs, and liquor bottles are present in abundance, to be involved in affective dynamics that involve their human companions, characters and readers. A cape or a gun, a painting or the texture of a fabric can be among the most powerful things to remain in the memory of a reader of one of these writers' stories. Maurizia Boscagli (2014, 13) suggests that modernist texts are prone to pair material things with affective and somatic responses in both characters and audiences. However, the conscious, interpretive eye tends to glide over affective things in fiction, perhaps registering them as a *motif* but then waiting for more human fictional entities, a character or a narrator, to provide a meaning for the feeling evoked by the presentation of the thing.

This chapter points out moments of affective intensity in Barnes's and Rhys's stories, in which material things are involved. The discussion introduces further complexity to the notions of subject and object as tools of analysis. How do things participate in the creation of emotions and affects in fiction? Is it a question of surrogation and projection of emotions whose actual "target" would be another human being, or are things as agents also independently involved in the affectivity of the work? What means do the texts use to invite their readers to feel for humans and nonhuman things? The discussion of how fictional things gain their potential to affect us leads to a better understanding what fictional texts do: how they achieve their power to move readers, keep them interested in the story and have them leave it with a sense of having been touched.

Conceptually, this text has so far moved quite freely between feelings, affects, emotions and moods, but the terminology requires some clarification. There is little agreement about the use of terminology in this domain, and it is possible to use these terms as almost synonymous. However, 'affect' and 'affectivity' are also umbrella concepts that can encompass all the other phenomena, or even denote the general "interestedness" and value-ladenness inherent to all life

(Colombetti 2013). More specifically, these notions evoke affect theory, a combination of approaches that foreground the biological and impersonal, presubjective qualities of feeling. 'Emotion' usually refers to short-lived episodes of feeling in an individual, as opposed to more pertinent and sometimes impersonal 'moods', and feelings that are conceptualized by a conscious mind and thus can be named. These terms evoke research traditions in the vein of cognitive psychology and neuroscience. Emotions are thus linked to human subjects, although several studies importantly recognize their intersubjective and socioculturally constructed characteristics (see Damasio 2003, 47; Ahmed 2004). 'Feeling' is a more vernacular and general term that is used here, too, to highlight the embodied experientiality of affects. 'Affect', too, has a more specific meaning in which it becomes an alternative to emotion. It denotes an ambiguous intensity and an instance of being "moved" or "touched," rather than a conceptualizable psychological event. As explained by Jonathan Flatley: "Where *emotion* suggests something that happens inside and tends toward outward expression, *affect* indicates something relational and transformative. One *has* emotions; one is affected *by* people or things" (Flatley 2008, 12, emphasis in the original). This definition of affect is embraced by the study at hand, because of the way its relationality situates affect in encounters between surfaces rather than in the metaphorical depths of a human subject (see also Seigworth & Gregg 2010; Ahmed 2004), which offers more possibilities to describe affective encounters between people and things.

The notion of affect is related to two different research traditions. Psychologist Silvan Tomkins's influential work, developed later especially by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, is characterized by naming of eight or nine primary affects that each arise from changes in the intensity of neural stimulation (Sedgwick & Frank 1995, 74).[77] Thus, Tomkins's affects resemble various versions of lists of "basic emotions" that are recognized by affective scientists (Colombetti 2013, 26–29). Significantly, this approach understands affect as a phenomenon that surpasses the body-mind dichotomy, and arises and is distributed in networks (Flatley 2008, 17; Sedgwick & Frank 1995, 74; Gibbs 2010, 191).

The other influential branch within affect theory stems from Baruch Spinoza through Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Brian Massumi. Massumi defines affect as "prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (Massumi 2013, xv). Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (2010, 20) suggest that we see affectivity as a process in which "bodies communicate with other bodies through their gestures and conduct to arouse visceral responses and prompt forms of judgment that do



77 For referring to Tomkins's work, I mostly use the compiled edition *Shame and Its Sisters* edited by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank.

not necessarily pass through conscious awareness." Following this approach, in this chapter, affects are regarded as embodied, social and potentially contagious via different material expressions, but not limited to the human sphere. This study benefits from affect theory for its inclusion of the nonhuman and the material, but also draws from cognitively oriented and phenomenological discussions of emotion and affect, especially enactivist and phenomenological approaches, which often come quite close to affect theory.

This chapter focuses on the affectivity of material things first in Rhys', then in Barnes's short fiction. Rhys' stories invite a discussion of the normative, political, and cultural aspects of happiness and their resonance with the acute bodily feeling in experiences of happiness and belonging evoked by the text. The latter part of the discussion of Rhys's work deals with a more specific and complex case of *empathy* between human beings and things in her work. Section 4.2.1 focuses on Barnes's fiction, with a special interest in the sense of touch and its connection to affectivity. Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 discuss the role of things in gestures that express and realize affectivity, and the specific case of pleasure in material things. The discussion begins and ends with positive affect: happiness and pleasure. These feelings have largely been ignored in the study of both Rhys and Barnes. Both authors write about characters experiencing positive feelings of pleasure, joy, belonging, comfort and bliss in relation to things, but it is possible that some previous ways of reading have obscured the reality of these affects, by assuming that they are covert expressions of another affective state, such as shame, depression, mourning, jealousy or trauma, which are seen as the principal affective denominators of their texts (see for instance Czarnecki 2009; Maslen 2009; Parsons 2007). Following the same logic, it is easy to view material things as covert expressions for the actual human object of the original emotion. Recent research has begun to challenge these positions (Taylor 2012; Frost 2013), and this study joins them with the addition that by paying attention to materialities and sensory experience, the affective fields of happiness and pleasure in the texts can be explored in all their ambiguity.

# 4.1 Nice Things: Belonging, Happiness, and Empathy with Things in Jean Rhys's Stories

"Don't get excited. You know what happens when you get excited and exalted, don't you? [...] And then you know how you collapse like a pricked balloon, don't you?" Sasha Jansen warns herself in *Good Morning, Midnight* (Rhys 1985, 351). It is almost a commonplace that Jean Rhys's heroines are unhappy, alienated, down-and-out and depressed. As we have seen, the women she creates are usually set away from any home, in hotel rooms, streets or cafes of a city that they seem to be only visiting, even if indeterminately. Their attitude toward the world outside is marked by a sense of separateness, alienation and even hostility. When the characters experience positive feelings, it often comes with a caveat for the risk of overdoing it, and an acute sense of its fleeting nature. However, moments of pleasure and happiness, togetherness, belonging, empathy, and sympathy are be notably intense even in the midst of the bleakest stories, and often seem to come about with the help of material things. As Laura Frost notes, pleasure is indeed a "dominant concern" in Rhys's texts, although it has been overlooked (Frost 2013, 163). Rhys herself seems to have had a complex relationship to positive affect. Interviewed in *The Paris Review*, she states: "I've never written when I was happy. I didn't want to" (Vreeland 1979, 224). On the other hand, in *Harper's Magazine* a year earlier, she mentions having derived pleasure from clothes, to defy the role already ascribed to her, largely based on her heroines, of a victim; an assumption that "I have never had any good times, never laughed, never got my own back, never dared, never worn pretty clothes, never been happy, never known wild hopes or wilder despairs" (Rhys 1978, 70). The comment suggests a connection in Rhys's thinking between "pretty clothes" and "good times" as well as their inherent complexity that always hints at negative feelings, but not necessarily amounts only to those.

In the following, I use Sara Ahmed's discussion of happiness to look at the part material things play in the evocations of positive feelings and affective encounters in Rhys. How does happiness as a cultural, normative orientation relate to happiness as something experienced, a bodily feeling of pleasure? A sense of belonging can be a sign not only of being at home in one's surroundings and one's body, but also submitting to sociocultural norms to pass as one of the

crowd. The suggestion is that a focus on materiality and embodiment added to the sociocultural discussion can help in acknowledging the latter dimension without it undermining the first, to appreciate the critical aspects of Rhys's work without ascribing excessive victimhood to her characters.

### 4.1.1. Normative and Lived Happiness

In "Learning to Be a Mother" (1927), the narrator has just given birth at an obscure clinic, and her friend Colette comes to visit: "Colette came as soon as I could see visitors, laden of course with flowers and grapes" (*LB,* 125). The situation is not exclusively happy: the narrator feels depressed and unable to "like" her child, and the father of the baby is apparently not in sight. A policeman inquiring after him is the narrator's only visitor besides Colette. Gifts are a way of passing emotion and orientation and recognizing the importance of a certain moment or transformation: "I think grapes and flowers are nice things, so I give them to you to celebrate this event" (see Mauss 2000, 11–12). Thus, they can be included among what Sara Ahmed calls "happy objects." The term pertains not exclusively to material objects, but also culturally constructed objects of orientation, such as marriage and childbirth.

Sara Ahmed locates emotion in the intersubjective, social sphere, as an effect of the circulation of signs and objects (Ahmed 2004, 45). Emotions are not reducible to objects, nor are they a subjective phenomenon, but in constant movement between the two, something shared and socially defined. For Ahmed, what defines a group is an orientation toward the same objects as "happy" ones (Ahmed 2010, 35).[78] Such communities come with an inherent danger, since they create norms for the right and wrong ways to be happy. Ahmed uses examples from queer fiction to illustrate the conflict between the idea of a heterosexual marriage and family as the culmination of happiness, and other possibilities of a happy life. There is no necessary danger of normative inscriptions of happiness in concrete grapes and flowers of Rhys's story. They can exemplify a bond between two characters, or an adherence to custom that affords bringing certain items to a new mother in hospital. In this scene, however, there arises a suspicion typical of Rhys's work. In the context of the narrator's way

78 Ahmed most often uses the term 'emotion', but she uses it much in the way 'affect' is used here.

of speaking about herself and her situation, the use of "of course" in the passage can denote activity typical of Colette that the narrator does not put such importance on, but it also exposes the normativity of the situation. Colette is happy about the family event, but for the narrator it is more ambiguous. This passage exposes the ironical tone in which most Rhys's depictions of such happy objects are delivered.

Sometimes gifts, along with other happy things, are the stuff of daydreams for Rhys's characters. "He will buy me roses and carnations and chocolates and a pair of pink silk pyjamas and heaps of books" (*LB,* 111), the narrator of "A Night" (1927) describes a fantasy of a man she is conjuring up in her imagination, one who will rescue her from her unspecified predicament. Before encountering the wax "gentleman" and the comforting stranger (see Section 3.1), Dorothy Dufreyne of "In the Rue de l'Arrivée" sits in a Montparnasse café, dreaming of becoming a famous fashion artist and being "restored to a life when afternoon tea, punctually at five, toast, cakes, maid, rattle of cups in saucers would be a commonplace" (*LB*, 116). The narrator comments: "Such was Miss Dufreyne's strange and secret idea of bliss" (Ibid.). The dream does not actually seem that strange nor secret. It is a version of a stereotypical British ideal, very "commonplace" indeed. In Rhys's writing, such stereotypes are both cherished as safe havens and looked at slantly in an ironic or queering perspective. The unreality of the dream man in "A Night" is revealed by the frantic list of gifts the narrator imagines receiving from him, in which their rather conventionally romantic character is combined with quantitative and qualitative exactness ("a *pair* of pyjamas," "roses and carnations" as opposed to "flowers"). These are normative fantasies, things that are socially acceptable for a young woman to dream of (with the exception of "heaps of books"), presented in a slightly comical tone and even marked as "strange." In Dorothy's case, the irony is highlighted by her encounters on the street with the dismal wax head and the comforting, silent stranger, neither of which complies with the norms exemplified by the daydream.

At the same time, however, the reader of the stories is invited to experience what it is like to have such dreams. This is helped by the sensory cues given by the mention of things: an opportunity to enact, as fictionally experienced by Dorothy, the rattle of cups, the fabric of silk pajamas, the smell of roses and carnations and the taste of grapes. These qualities need not be explicitly described, or even ascribed to the experiences of a character. I suggest that merely mentioning them may act as a cue for the reader's sensory imagination that draws on experiential traces of similar things (see Caracciolo 2014; Zwaan 2008). This makes them experientially real and tactile as well as fictional, and lends the feeling of "realness" to the potential emotions experienced alongside them; research has shown that emotions induced by fictional accounts of experience are similar to ones produced by real stimuli (Schroeder et al. 2006, 26–30; Gibbs 2017). Thus, readers can get a relatively complex *sense* of emotional activity even within a very short piece of writing like "A Night" (three loosely set pages in the 1984

facsimile edition of *The Left Bank*). They may sense the hopes attached to the pajamas, flowers and books, accompanied with a feeling of leisure and comfort. The context of the whole story, its focalizer lying alone in bed, moving between reverie and insomniac rumination, makes these pleasant sensations more ambiguous, but they have a great role in making this ambiguity meaningful. The sensory imaginings that accompany the reading event actually bring Rhys's characters (as experiencing bodies) quite close to the reader, even if their ironical stance keeps them at a distance (cf. Frost 2013, 206).

"Mixing Cocktails" and "Again the Antilles," the Caribbean stories in the middle of *The Left Bank* are positioned as though they, too, were an enjoyable daydream in the middle of the grim Paris reality of the majority of the stories. They are led to by a description of an encounter in a Montparnasse restaurant with a Caribbean family in "Trio," and followed by a harsh account of the focalizer's mental stages during five days without food in Paris, in "Hunger." In "Mixing Cocktails," the child-narrator lies in a hammock on the veranda, dreaming of a future full of "sweeping dresses and feathered hats" and love affairs, illustrated by "the dark moustache and perfectly creased trousers" (*LB,* 91). These dreams are an unambiguous illustration of a socially acquired orientation toward gendered objects that are considered to embody happiness, this time related to the ideas of heterosexual romance. In the context of the entire collection, these fantasies acquire an ironic tone. There are indeed dresses, hats and creased trousers in the lives of the women in *The Left Bank*, but life with them does not always turn out to be happy.

The narrator's orientation toward the adult community is also present in her dedicated duty of mixing cocktails for the rest of the family, which she claims to do very well: "I measure out angostura and gin, feeling important and happy, with an uncanny intuition as to how strong I must make each separate drink" (*LB,* 92). For her, the cocktails are an actual, material (unlike the "virtual" dresses, hats and trousers she dreams about) shortcut to adult life as a fully authorized subject in a human community, while for the grown women in *The Left Bank,* cocktails serve mostly as treatments for sorrows, although they also afford rare moments of bliss (cf. Frost 2013, 193–194). The sense of irony in relation to the other stories in the collection is heightened by the choice of the word "uncanny" to describe the narrator's skills with cocktails. By its Freudian links to horror and the repressed it creates a sense of premonition of the melancholy women sitting in Paris cafes with a *fine à l'eau*. However, like in the previous stories, the fact that the narrator feels "important and happy" dreaming in a warm, sunny place, should not be dismissed because of the foreboding overtones. A reader is invited to spontaneously enact these feelings while reading, and they remain as "real" and tangible even

when the social structures that support them (heterosexual power relations and the link between cocktails and unhappy women) are looming in the background.

Similar ambiguity can be read in the scene with the "tailor-made and beret" in "Mannequin." Such stylish clothes are worn by all the models in the store. There is pleasure in buying and owning the beautiful things that mark a shared taste and an orientation toward shared ideas of happiness, beauty, and femininity. A reader has the choice to identify with such pleasure and the feeling of happiness that follows it, but also regard it critically, given the overall ironic tone of the collection. However, there is also a sensory feeling of pleasure in the very act of wearing the clothes. Attachment to things is never abstract or disembodied: important things must be "kept close to the person," like Louise Purbrick (2014, 9) argues, and clothes cannot shed their proximity to the body. The literary construction of Anna's fictional body and its livedness through material things and bodily affectivity allows for readerly experience of what it is like to be supported by well-chosen clothing in a social situation. This enactment actualizes the materiality of the "happy" clothes and brings them to life as affect-inducing bodies in both the narrative space and the space of reading. The acuteness of the experience thus created challenges the readers' ability to distance themselves completely from the feelings ascribed to the character. An ironically sensitive implied reader, who is able to decode the tailor-made and the beret as metaphors or even symptoms of the consumer society and the objectification of woman, does not existseparately from affective engagement. Actually, in their affective materiality, the things refuse to be read only symbolically or symptomatically. Instead, there is an acute sense of happiness, however short-lived, that the reader has to encounter and feel in some form while reading and interpreting the text. As Jenefer Robinson (2010) suggests, when reading we cannot avoid feeling the emotions evoked by the text. Their cognitive judgment comes later and is colored by the initial affective appraisal.

Another affective tone that emerges in encounters with things in *The Left Bank* is a sense of belonging and its counterpart, alienation. As Sara Ahmed writes:

> We become alienated—out of line with an affective community—when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are already attributed as being good. [...] If we are disappointed by something that we expected would make us happy, then we generate explanations of why that thing is disappointing. [...] We become strangers, or affect aliens, in such moments. (Ahmed 2010, 37)

Rhys's characters are recurrently pictured as "affect aliens." The ambiguous dimensions of belonging and object-orientations are most markedly present in "At the Villa D'Or." This story marks another

change of scenery in the collection, from the dreary prison in "The Sidi" to the French *Côte d'Azur.* The associated ideas of warmth and the proximity of the sea place the stories in this part ("Villa D'Or" and "La Grosse Fifi") as parallel to the ones set on the Caribbean islands.[79] In "At the Villa d'Or," the Villa is filled to the brim with objects that imply conspicuous material well-being. Sara is shown in "the depths of a huge arm-chair," observing the room and its people, thinking benevolently: "And very nice too" (*LB,* 155). However, she also thinks: "At the Villa d'Or life was something shallow... that tinkled meaninglessly... shallow but safe" (*LB,* 159). The most detailed description in the story, as is typical of Rhys's work, is of articles of dress, including Mrs. Valentine's shoes of gold brocade, her necklace of green beads "with which she fidgeted incessantly" (*LB,* 158), Mr. Valentine's horn-rimmed spectacles, and the manservant's livery. Even the detail of the drapery around the waists of "little lady" figures that an artist is decorating Mr. Valentine's bedroom panels with is taken into focus.

The latest example of concealing apparel points at the hypocritical atmosphere of the house, in conflict with the sensuous pleasure offered by the beautiful surroundings. There is also a dehumanizing and thingifying touch in the story, as in the description of the manservant: "Charles was like the arm-chairs, English" (*LB,* 156). Sara answers "patiently" to Mrs. Valentine's rambling talk, and agrees "politely" to Mr. Valentine's knowing explanations about stars and his propositions verging on indecent (*LB,* 159, 162). She knows her place and her responsibilities as a sponsored guest. The story hints that the couple is not that happy after all, for instance that Mrs. Valentine seems to feel disgust at a portrait of her husband. In light of this, the story comes to seem like another outright account of modern alienation, this time not in an urban environment but in the sunny luxury of a home in Southern France.

In the middle of "Villa D'Or," however, there is a moment of serenity as Sara, while listening to Mrs. Valentine, imagines the "silken caress of the water when she would bathe next morning," meaning either swimming in the sea or taking a bath (*LB,* 159). The story ends with Sara retreating to her bedroom:

> She opened the windows wide and looked out on the enchanted night, then sighed with pleasure at the glimpse of her white, virginal bathroom through the open door: the bath-salts, the scents, the crystal bottles.
>
> She thought again: "Very nice too, the Villa d'Or." (*LB,* 164)

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79 The other story set on the *Côte d'Azur*, "La Grosse Fifi," has a further allusion to the Caribbean: its focal character is called Roseau, which is also the capital of Dominica, the island on which Rhys was born.

The sensations of the imagined caress of water and the air of the "enchanted" night coming in through the window create moments of pleasure that are also rendered to the materiality of language, in waves of rhythm and rhyme (wide–night–sighed–white). Water as an enjoyable element is reified in the bathroom bottles that contain salt and scents, and simultaneously banalized by these things set in the interior world of the house as opposed to the depths of the nearby sea, or the night air. This comparison adds to the ironical dimensions of the story. Then again, the sensory pleasure the toilette items are able to create does not need to be questioned in order to appreciate the irony and ambiguity. They are smaller in size, artificial and conventionally feminine, but none of these features actually justifies considering them any lesser as affective or pleasure-giving things. The Villa d'Or may be a banal and dehumanizing environment, and staying in it may mean submitting to some norms of behavior and affective orientations that are portrayed as alienating; yet Sara's "very nice too," not only denotes an ironical submission to normativity but also the actual pleasure that the Villa affords, through the enactment of which the reader may be more likely to sympathize with Sara's point of view in the ironical and critical sense as well.

Rhys often blends natural and artificial manifestations of materiality, making the latter act as surrogate for the former, as in *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), in which the main character Anna, also from a Caribbean island, describes her actions when feeling out of place in England: "I would put my head under the water and listen to the noise of the tap running. I would pretend it was a waterfall" (Rhys 1985, 56). In *Voyage in the Dark,* the scene contributes to a tragic rather than happy effect, while Sara's pleasure in scents and bath salts is more clearly ambiguous. Readers are invited once again to enact this mixed pleasure of nature and man-made things, and to attribute these sensations to Sara's character. Thus, embodied sensations brought about by material objects create Rhys's characters as experiencing fictional subjects. At the same time, the evocations of happiness and the sense of belonging create a position for the reader to take within the text, to partake of these sensations on an embodied level, *simultaneously* with perhaps sneering knowingly at the shallowness of the life described. This position is ascribed to Sara in the fictional world, and the ambiguity is already inherent in her character. Ahmed sees a danger of downplaying unhappy experiences and affective alienation in affirmative feminist readings that emphasize positive and empowering experience. "We want to reread melancholy subjects," she states (Ibid., 50). Rhys's stories are undeniably full of melancholy subjects and affect aliens, but rereading them also seems to produce affirmative results. They expose happiness as a socioculturally constructed normative orientation, yet make their reader live through simultaneously enjoyable and uncomfortable feelings, evoked even by such allegedly superficial things as bath-salts, cocktails and berets, and thereby experientially recognize the ways we care for and feel with such things.

## 4.1.2. Objects Having Fun

The last two stories in *The Left Bank*, "La Grosse Fifi" and "Vienne," are the most complex from the point of view of things and affects. The last and longest story, "Vienne," is composed of eleven sections that by themselves resemble the shorter and sketchier pieces in the collection. The first ones relate Frances and Pierre's prodigal life in and around Vienna, focusing on anecdotal accounts of their friends and acquaintances. The young couple's prosperity ends abruptly as Pierre's shady business transactions and debt are revealed. In the latter sections, the couple flees through Prague and Budapest toward London in hope of finding financial aid. The physical movement is paralleled in the narrative discourse by movement from one sensation, one desired or encountered affective body (person or thing) to another. Material things are here used as tokens of memories, but they are also tokens of orientation, happy objects. In this story, too, there is comfort and pleasure to be found in pretty clothes to wear and "nice" and "elegant" things to surround oneself with (*LB*, 232, 235).

Even before the revelation of the Pierre's problems, readers can see some hints at the precarity of this happiness in the exaggerated tone of the descriptions of the pleasure of spending, as well as in Frances's comment of being surrounded by "pretty people with doubtful husbands or no husbands, or husbands in jail" (*LB,* 200). Frances's frantic eulogy to money, which follows this comment, is ironically charged; it creates a typical sense of pleasure as a state of excitement that contains a sense of insecurity and excess:

> Nice to have lots of money—nice, nice.
> Goody to have a car, a big chauffeur,
> rings, and as many frocks as I liked.
> Good to have money, money. All the flowers I wanted.
> All the compliments I wanted. Everything, everything.
> Oh, great god money—you make possible
> all that's nice in life. Youth and beauty, the
> envy of women, and the love of men.
> Even the luxury of a soul, a character and thoughts
> of one's own you give, and only you. (*LB*, 221–222)

In all its dramatic expression, the passage is a striking vision of the relationship between things, money, and human subjectivity. The accumulation of the adjectives "nice" and "good" paradoxically acts as a diminutive that foregrounds the precarious character of happiness. The passage connects "nice" and shallow things, money, and

commodities, with notions that tend to be considered "deep": beauty, soul, character and thoughts. The way readers of *The Left Bank* see its characters cling to clothes and other commodities, the intensity with which the stories depict emotions related to the love of nice things and the dread of poverty, and the sheer number of references to such nice things probably cause this passage in the last story of the collection to look like a burst of honest and acute feeling rather than a melodramatic exaggeration. We can agree, drawing from Ahmed's blend of social constructivism and phenomenology, as well as from enactivist thinking, that the things we call 'soul' and 'character' do not arise from the depths of human nature, but are created and negotiated in interaction with the sociocultural sphere in which money, flowers, compliments, chauffeurs, and frocks also circulate.

A world in which money buys subjectivity is a grim one and the agency it grants is limited, but all this is also highly identifiable, especially when preceded by a collection of short stories that depict the insecurity, despair and fleeting moments of happiness of women navigating a modern, urban, commercial environment. Rhys's female characters cannot be reduced to passivity or victimhood even if money gave part of their agency, for in this system of thought the same applies to everyone's agency. By putting readers through Frances's travels in Europe and her attachment to precariously pleasurable and supportive things, the story invites them to adopt a simultaneously critical and immersed position: to grasp the allure of "nice things" and to see the happiness built on them as perilous, but understandable. The story offers no moral solution. The couple is at a risk of getting caught, but they always escape; Frances contemplates a joint suicide, but it does not happen as she planned. The end leaves their fate open, providing hope but no closure: "It was: 'Nach London!'" (*LB*, 256).

The most intriguing feature of "Vienne" may be the way Rhys parallels Frances's briefly described human acquaintances with material objects, both of which seem to have similar functions as signs of a happy time (always already lost in the moment of narration). Consider for instance this passage from that uses a list form to give an experiential insight into what Vienna was like at the time of the events:

> Hot sun, my black frock, a hat with
> roses, music, lots of music—
> The little dancer at the "Parisien" with a Kirchner
> girl's legs and a little faun's face.[80] (*LB*, 193)

This passage is followed by a description of the couple's friend André's succession of lovers (see Section 5.1). Further on, there are three phrases that describe the place and time, more explicitly Radetzsky Hotel near Vienna, the summer of 1921, "cracky with the joy of life"

80 Probably a reference to the paintings of young women and dancers by German artist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938).

(*LB*, 202): "The girls were well dressed, not the slightest bit made up—that seemed odd after Paris"; "Gorgeous blue sky and green trees and a good orchestra"; "I'd darling muslin frocks covered with frills and floppy hats—or a little peasant dress and no hat" (*LB*, 201–202). The narrator describes herself at a particularly happy moment as follows: "face like a doll's—not a line, not a shadow, eyes nicer than a doll's" (*LB*, 229). The women in these excerpts, both the focalizer and the ones observed by her, are diminished and reified by words such as "little," "child," "doll," and "nice." The precarious moments of happiness attributed to a character can be made experientially relatable with the help of material things and embodied feelings. But what happens to characters who are shown to be made happy, again with the help of material things, but who are thus thingified by the speech of others or themselves? Do we need to read them as victims or vehicles of irony, and is the reading doomed to rely on the subject/object dichotomy that the text so strongly seems to suggest?

To foreground this complexity, let us look at the last story but one in *The Left Bank*, "La Grosse Fifi." At the hotel restaurant, the character of Fifi is introduced to the reader through the bewildered eyes of Mark Olsen, a young man in the company of the focalizer, Roseau. From Mark's first words, Fifi joins the ranks of women-as-things in the collection. Roseau's answer, however, reveals her as a more complex figure:

> "Oh my Lord! What's that?"
> "That's Fifi," answered Roseau in a low voice
> and relaxing into a smile for the first time.
> "Fifi! Of course—it would be—Good Lord!—Fifi!"
> His voice was awed. "She's—she's terrific, isn't she?"
> "She's a dear," said Roseau unexpectedly. (*LB*, 166–167)

Fifi is not a "who" but a "what." She is presented as a thing, a terrific and awe-inspiring, grotesque apparition of femininity that is well beyond the norm. Nevertheless, Roseau feels "unexpectedly" warmly toward her, while she participates in the objectifying discourse and at times sees her as an abject part of the seedy hotel surroundings. Sympathy and empathy between focal characters and grotesquely presented figures of "bad" women recur in Rhys's fiction as part of the stories' general tendency to disrupt notions of sexuality and femininity. Fifi, however, is an especially complex, both lively and thing-like example of such character. When Roseau is crying in her room in a fit of desperation following a large dose of Veronal,[81] Fifi enters to console her with an array of comforting things. She is "[…] wonderfully

81 A brand name of a barbiturate commonly used as a sleeping aid in the first part of the 20th century.

garbed in a transparent night-gown of a vivid rose colour trimmed with yellow lace," with a "dirty dressing-gown" thrown around her neck (*LB,* 173); she helps Roseau dress in a lace nightgown and hands her a pocket handkerchief; Roseau clutches the flannel sleeve of Fifi's garment, begging her to stay. The next day she lends her a book of French poetry and, after Roseau tells her she would rather read a detective novel, *Le fantôme de l'Opera* (1910).

In her role as a consoler, endowed with consoling things, Fifi becomes both a mother-figure and a subject of apotheosis, "as kind as God" (*LB*, 175). This is, once again, an ironical statement, but the feelings of affection that accompany it are acutely imaginable. At the same time, Fifi remains the "terrific" object of (patriarchal) gaze until the end of the story, which is also her own both melodramatic and tragic end. Fifi is a controversial object of attachment, and the affection Roseau feels toward Fifi makes her temporarily an "affect alien" in the eyes of her acquaintances. The affection seems to be expressed equally as sympathy toward another suffering woman and as admiration of her appearance *as an object*, her kitsch aesthetics and the comforting things she has to offer, possibly also her physical size. Curiously enough, her thing-likeness is part of what renders Fifi a subject in the story. She becomes an agent in the story through her looks and the things that she surrounds herself with, and through which Roseau's focalization suggests her as potentially identifiable. The mentions of corsets, night-gowns and dressing-gowns wrapped around Fifi's fictional body are cues for the reader to imagine her as a feeling, lived body. She may be a thing, but she is not an object.

The same applies to the other characters in the stories discussed above as well: Anna in her stylish clothes, Sara surrounded by the beautiful things she does not own, Frances with everything money can buy. Abreast all the objectifying gaze and talk, the stories foreground their characters as things in a manner of presentation that resembles Barnes's descriptive passages analyzed in the previous chapter. The characters are material bodies surrounded and supported by material things, whose very materiality, albeit fictional, makes them experientially real to a reader. Thus, their subjectivity (agency) and objectivity (passivity) are inseparable. Besides recognizing and enacting fictional, embodied sensations and emotions, and attributing these to a character, readers resonate with the way material things participate in such emotions. In the field of phenomenology, it has been suggested that material objects can be incorporated or used as scaffolding in the experience, sustenance and expression of affective states (Colombetti 2016; Maiese 2016). A coffee cup can be habitually grabbed in need of strength or support; a nice suit can be used to gain self-confidence; a musician's capacity to express emotions and create affective response depends on her interaction with the instrument. As can be seen in many of the stories analyzed in this study so far, especially clothes are often incorporated into the affective experiences of Rhys's characters. This can be recognized and enacted by readers as a practice they most likely themselves have engaged in.

In a related instance of new materialist analysis, Maurizia Boscagli reads the "Nausicaa" episode in Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) as a challenge to a modern idea of subjectivity as a rigorous abstraction, separate from the body and the material. Boscagli presents Gerty McDowell, the young girl Leopold Bloom peeps at on the beach, as a *bricoleur,* an active subject who is able to reshape commodity fantasies and the clothes that carry them to suit her own needs and to negotiate her identity (Boscagli 2014, 94–95, 100). She reads the pornographic spectacle of Gerty's femininity affirmatively, as a description of means for resisting commodification and objectification, in which "the object is alive and has lots of fun" (Ibid., 91). I would argue that this is exactly what Fifi is doing, too, besides her suffering from jealousy and uncertainty, and only until she is killed, of course. *Ulysses* is intertextually linked to Rhys's work, and she employs many literary devices that resemble Joyce's.[82] Possibly she even develops them further, at least in the problematic case of the representation of male gaze/female spectacle.[83] When the reader is offered a position that enables embodied identification, the characters, although objectified, become subjectively "alive," and the "fun" they are having can be felt as real. The reader is invited to imagine the subjective, embodied being of the characters *by* being shown them as things, as bodies that engage with and incorporate other things. All this can be read and understood on parallel with the ironical, critical tones in relation to normative ideas of happiness, for instance, that are equally prominent in the text, because of what Merja Polvinen (2017) has called "the double vision of fiction." Furthermore, in such intuitive reading there is no question of the agency of the female characters: they are not only experiencing bodies, but also active ones that use the material means and affective orientations available for the purposes of self-definition, survival and pleasure.

### 4.1.3. Empathy, Sympathy, and Being-with-Things

> The child plays at being not only a shopkeeper
> or a teacher, but also a windmill and a train.
> Walter Benjamin: "On the Mimetic Faculty"[84]

82 In fact, the detailed description of Gerty's clothes and make-up paired with her vague dreams of an ideal husband, and the parodic tone of their representation are shared features with *The Left Bank*.

83 On the reversal of the positions of gendered spectacle and spectator in Rhys's work, see Oulanne 2012.

84 1933; Benjamin 1979, 160.

"Let Them Call It Jazz" in *Tigers Are Better-Looking* begins with an encounter between Selina and her landlady, who is turning Selina out of her apartment after she has refused to pay rent in advance. As if to make her point more concrete, the landlady kicks Selina's personal belongings: "When I tell her no, she give my suitcase one kick and it burst open. My best dress fall out, then she laugh and give another kick" (*TBL,* 44). Later, in a new but unpleasant flat, she wants to put on the same "best dress," to leave and look for a better place to live, but she is stopped by an emotional reaction that leads her tTo be too tired to leave:

> [...] but it's a funny thing—when I take up that dress and remember how my landlady kick it I cry. I cry and I can't stop. When I stop I feel tired to my bones, tired like old woman. (*TBL*, 45)

There is a metonymical and metaphorical relationship between Selina and the dress: one is dumped out of a suitcase, the other out of an apartment, and the imagined proximity of the dress to Selina's body makes it expressive of something that she feels "to her bones." Readers are also invited to imagine that the dress has travelled a long way with Selina, from Martinique, enclosed in the suitcase and worn on important occasions. Thus, it is reminiscent of Antoinette's red dress in Wide Sargasso Sea (see Section 2.3.2). This dress, too, carries residue of its wearer and their common past. In the context of "Let Them Call It Jazz," we can observe that the dress is a motif with a structural function: after several misfortunes and a period in prison, Selina finds a job as a seamstress in a department store ("altering ladies' dresses," TBL, 62), meets a man who is interested in a prison song she is singing and who sells it forward, not leaving Selina more than five pounds. However, the story ends with a retaliation that shows how important dresses are for Rhys's characters and stories, out of necessity but also for providing style and enjoyment: "I buy myself a dusty pink dress with the money" (TBL, 63).

In "Illusion" in *The Left Bank*, the narrator realizes in a sudden epiphany the meaning the clothes she unexpectedly discovers in the cupboard of Miss Bruce have for their owner. However, she is moved by the clothes themselves:

> I went to lock the wardrobe doors and felt a sudden, irrational pity for the beautiful things inside. I imagined them, shrugging their silken shoulders, rustling, whispering about the anglaise who had dared to buy them in order to condemn them to life in the dark... and I opened the door again.
>
> The yellow dress appeared malevolent, slouching on its hanger; the black ones were mournful, only the little chintz frock smiled gaily, waiting for the supple body and limbs that should breathe life into it... (*LB*, 35–36)

The narrator feels pity for the dresses, but deems it "irrational." She is first shown to imagine the dresses displaying anthropomorphic gestures and attitudes, which she reports as free indirect speech to the reader. In the latter part of the quotation, she has opened the wardrobe door again, and instead of merely imagining, sees the clothes as expressive of personalities, each with its own "appearance" mental state of malevolence, mournfulness or gaiety. The clothes clearly have an expressive function in both these stories. The narrator of "Illusion" not only imagines, but sees clothes as displaying emotions, which give rise to pity in her. Like Antoinette's dress in *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Selina's dress as a literary device expresses something other than itself, but it is still a thing made of fabric whose material being is evoked in the text. Can this kind of affective movement between a person and a thing be called an instance of empathy or sympathy? If a reader of the passage is called to an empathic reaction, what is the role of the dress and its materiality?

'Empathy' has a variety of definitions that range from motor mimicry and mental simulation to mind-reading and conscious recognition of the mental state of another (see Bateson 2009). Empathy can be caring for another, being affected by another, or imagining what it is like to be that other (Zahavi 2014, 129). It is also, in its many forms, an affective and cognitive component involved in reading fiction. In her seminal account of narrative empathy, Suzanne Keen (2007, 4) defines it as "vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect" that occurs between readers and fictional characters, which can then, possibly, lead to *sympathy* or *personal distress,* both distinct from empathy. However, the relevance and possibility of "sharing an affect" for empathy has been contested for instance by phenomenologists Dan Zahavi and Philippe Rochat (2015), who suggest that empathy is not about the blurring of borders between the self and other, and therefore cannot be described as sharing an emotion or affect, but about accessing or grasping the mental state of the other *through its embodied expression,* while the other remains other. Both accounts of course rest on an assumption of a minded creature and an experience, fictional or actual, to empathize with.[85]

Nevertheless, if we go back to early discussions of empathy and sympathy, in which their definitions are especially entangled, the focus is surprisingly often on nonhuman, even inanimate entities. Jane Bennett (2016, 607, 609) points out how 19th century accounts

85 In the context of "object-oriented ontology," there is talk of the experience of inanimate objects, discussed at length by Ian Bogost in his book *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing* (2013). However, Bogost remains too vague and makes too rash conclusions on the basis of examples from computer technology, to be of assistance here.

of the concept of sympathy, as they appear in the poetry of Walt Whitman, range from a moral sentiment to mimetic "contagion," embodied resonance and gravitational pull, a "more-than-human" material force that operates upon human and nonhuman bodies alike. Empathy, as well as its German originator *Einfühlung,*[86] were first used in the domain of aesthetics. Vernon Lee uses it in the sense of the emotional, embodied reaction that occurs in a viewer of a scenery, an object or a piece of art, and the subsequent effect that this reaction has on the perception of the object (Lee 1913, 61–69). This is a case of self-objectification slightly different from the ones discussed in the previous section. The process described by Lee is located between a perceiving subject and a perceived object as an affective relation, in which both actually emerge as active parties. This is a projective account of empathy: we ascribe emotions to a thing, but the only emotions we have access to are our own. This view has ben criticized by phenomenologists, who suggest that we can perceive emotions, not just project our own, based on our ability to recognize feeling in another, not separating body and mind: the emotion is in the expression of the other, and while perceiving it we know it to be another's emotion (Ratcliffe 2015; Zahavi 2014; Scheler 1979; Stein 2010). We also need not have gone through a "similar" emotion to be able to grasp it.

Nonhuman things such as dresses are indeed others to us, and we cannot have the experience of being a dress. In phenomenological accounts, empathy in relation to them would be regarded as based on an illusion, because there is no actual mental state to perceive, yet the experience of empathy as cognitive and affective activity can still be seen as "real."[87] As regards literary fiction, readers are in the domain of illusions, quite wittingly, and still capable of being immersed in feelings evoked by them. Fiction can animate and personify things (see Bernaerts et al. 2014; Nishimura 2015), but Rhys's stories do not solely rely on such devices of fantasy. Nevertheless, they seem to deal with a form of empathy for or involving clothes. Dresses, of course, are literally anthropomorphic: they follow the form of the human body. Jane Bennett suggests that anthropomorphism might also work against anthropocentrism, by bringing some aspects of the things closer to human experience and, consequently, suggest that the human is not located above or outside the nonhuman world (Bennett 2010, 120). Literary means can be of help in bringing the nonhuman experientially close to human readers (Caracciolo 2016, 140).

What is the difference between Rhys's characters and the dresses they interact with, as fictional entities expressive of emotions? For one thing, readers are probably readier to attribute emotions to the human characters, but as they seem capable of feeling for and with nonhuman things, readers are invited to try on this perspective. But

86 Coined in 1873 by Robert Vischer and first applied to social cognition by Theodor Lipps.

87 I thank Anna Ovaska for an especially careful reading and discussion of this section, and of conceptual suggestions in relation to empathy.

is it empathy? Drawing on developmental psychology and affect theory, Anna Gibbs (2010) suggests that the contagion of affects in "mimetic communication" is neither a property of a subject or an object, but a multisensory synchronization of bodies, the capacity for which humans develop in early infancy (cf. Tomkins & Izard 1966, vii). We see emotions we can grasp in human bodies in other things and visual media bevause of a cross-sensory resemblance in expressive gestures, and these gestures in turn make us go through a mimetic affective experience on a very basic level, involving the other's otherness. Humans constantly communicate with the things around us in a bodily, kinaesthetic way that does not rely on projection but a tendency to perceive affective tones in the environment, and to act out affectivity in collaboration with the environment.

"Let Them Call It Jazz" stages an encounter in which the perception and expression of emotion become intermingled. A reader can imagine, and mimetically respond to, Selina mimetically communicating with the dress. We can imagine that Selina knows how it feels to be kicked and to fall like the dress, and see the dress as expressive of her feelings of disappointment and fatigue, but we can also imagine Selina as mimicking the dress, experiencing feelings parallel with its form and tactile feel, haptically experienced by the reader. The two make up an assemblage toward which readers can be pulled as they engage with the scene and draw on their own experiential traces. A reader's empathy might be consciously directed toward Selina, a lived, experiencing body, but it is nevertheless induced by the entire assemblage and the mimetic relations involved. Readers can identify Selina with the nonhuman thing on both a minimal preconscious level and a level of metonymical interpretation that can also result in narrative empathy.

In "Illusion", the narrator is shown to feel mostly pity and amazement and to imagine what it is like to be a beautiful object shut in a dark wardrobe. These dresses are not metonymically expressive of her experience, or their absent owner's; they are given their own fictional lives. These lives are expressed by the material properties of the dresses. They resemble human beings as they follow the shape of a human body, but they also remain clearly other, distinctly nonhuman and inanimate, like the chintz frock that waits for a human body to "breathe life into it." A part of the mimetic communication in the passage is produced by the personification of the dresses, but part is due to their expressive qualities *as material things*. We cannot claim for sure that this passage would result in narrative empathy. Instead, it seems to invite mimetic, kinesthetic enactment of the expressive forms of the dresses, with an affective content of its own. Narrative empathy, again, could be evoked by the whole scene, but it

is importance to note the vitality of the things as affective players in the potential empathic relation.

In "A Solid House" in *Tigers Are Better-Looking,* there is a similar encounter, only with less personification. Teresa's relationship to her black dress as a second-hand item in Miss Spearman's cupboard is different from the ones described here because of the similarity of the situations of the narrator and the dress: the latter is used as a metaphorical expression of the former (see Section 2.1). In another story with a cupboard, "A Spiritualist" (see Section 3.1), the Commandant describes the moment of opening his deceased lover's wardrobe: "I had the tears in my eyes, I assure you, for it is sad to see and to touch the dresses of a dead woman that one has loved" (*LB,* 39–40). The emphasis of the passage is on the senses, seeing and touching, which reminds us once more that the dresses are not only metaphorical or symbolic entities: if they work metaphorically, it is because of of their material, tactile qualities. The clothes are to be imagined as real and material, while Madeleine has become "a dead woman that one has loved," distanced by the indefinite article and the pronoun "one." The Commandant's feelings seem to be directed more toward the clothes than their owner.

Similarly, in a later story set in the same context, "Night Out 1925" (1976, published in *Sleep It off Lady*), a couple sees a "woman's scarlet hat" lying in a Paris gutter, and Suzy, the focalizer, reacts sympathetically: "Poor old hat [...]. Poor poor old hat. Someone ought to write a poem about that hat" (*SIOL*, 109). This happens after they have visited a brothel to have a drink with prostitutes. Suzy has taken a sympathetic stance toward the women, too, but it has largely been left unexpressed except for a large sum of money she has given them, which arguably reinforces the class and power divide between them. When she expresses her feelings, their object is a hat, a thing that may seem like an easier target for sympathy, left outside the tangles of human relations. On the other hand, things such as hats are actually quite central to human entanglements, too. The color of the hat reinforces its connections with transgressive female sexuality, denoting adultery for instance in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850).[88] Its lying in the gutter is another way Rhys's things make visible the expectations and fears of their protagonists and give material form to metaphorical language: in this case, to the risk of landing "in the gutter" that seems to haunt Rhys's characters. Suzy's reaction suggests that she feels sympathy, based on a bodily, mimetic relation, toward both the hat and the prostitutes. In the real world, if not a poem, then a short story is written about the hat, and with it, the experiences of marginalized women are brought within the sphere of potential narrative empathy on the part of the reader.

88 Jane Bennett, too, quotes a passage from *The Scarlet Letter,* demonstrating the sense of vitality given to the red cloth in the story, as the narrator feels it as "a burning heat" that causes him to shudder and drop it on the floor (Bennett 2016, 608).

In *The Left Bank*, even the conception of a human character as an object seems to paradoxically help, not hinder the empathy and identification of another character in relation to them, as was already noted in the case of "La Grosse Fifi." In "In the Rue de l'Arrivée," Dorothy defines a view of sympathy that could be applied to Rhys's work in general:

> And the sympathy which would have maddened her from the happy, the fortunate or the respectable, she strangely and silently accepted coming from someone more degraded than she was, more ignorant, more despised... [...]
>
> For the first time she had dimly realized that only the hopeless are starkly sincere and that only the unhappy can either give or take sympathy. (*LB*, 120–121)

The stranger's clothing, a cap to which a line of speech is assigned, is part of a system of style that informs readers about the man's and Dorothy's shared position as underdogs, and is in a metonymic relation to the man seen from behind. Nevertheless, there is another significant side to this angle of seeing: the man has left the woman alone and returned to his role as a stranger with his back turned. In light of other passages analyzed here, especially recalling the other hat in "A Night Out," it seems justified to claim that the way the man is presented as a thing paradoxically makes him a plausible object and source of empathy. Miss Dufreyne, like Suzy, is more comfortable with empathy for a thing than for a human.

Affect and empathy are not held back in Rhys's fiction by the distinctions between subject and object, human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate. The stories participate in what Bennett, writing about sympathy, calls "a mimetic tendency at large among bodies continuously affecting and being affected by each other" (Bennett 2016, 608). A reader of the texts is drawn into these affective relations and given both human and nonhuman agents to "communicate" and empathize with. It might well be more common for flesh-and-blood readers to direct their empathy toward the character, even though in the fictional world, it is the things that actually attract more empathy from the characters than other humans. Here, too, it is useful to look at the things and characters as assemblages, in which they generate the affectivity together.

When reading these passages, readers need not go through the exact same "state" as a dress that of course has no states of consciousness. It is not necessary to imagine what it is like to be a dress, at least on a conscious level. The evocation of feeling is built on more complex and ambiguous relations of mimicry in which things are incorporated. Dresses, as said, are a special case, being expressive especially thanks to their proximity to the body. The fictional frame that invites our empathy, in whatever form, is built on relations of

mimetic, affective communication and contagion that incorporate things. What the early aesthetic and phenomenological accounts of empathy and sympathy, as well as later contributions to new materialism and affect theory have in common is an understanding of the various phenomena of affective, corporeal intersubjectivity and *inter-objectivity*[89] that occur not so much within the individual mind but between human and nonhuman agents, which is why they resonate with the fictional examples, too. This is something that Keen recognizes, as she points out that narrative empathy is not merely about character identification, but also involves other actants and surroundings as well as the whole narrative situation (Keen 2013). Most importantly, these accounts help with the study of narrative empathy, by giving words to describe a basic, empathy-like grasping of feeling that is possible without an assumption of sameness.

In the stories discussed, the boundaries of the self can be transcended not by knowing an actual mental state, as there is none, but by the very fact that the mental states are constructed in the assemblage of things and humans, and between fictional assemblages and the reader. Many instances of narrative empathy on its basic level rely on our everyday experience of being-with-things. The sensory and expressive cues provided by the references to materialities act as suggestions of feeling, in which case it is the entire assemblage of characters and things that solicits the potential empathic response, intermingled with cultural issues and interpretations. Navigating these notions and theories around empathy, we can investigate how literature evokes the relations of self and other in a material, embodied way, and provides readers not only "the experience of the embodied mind of the other" (Zahavi 2014, 55), but also an understanding of this embodied mind as embedded in and extending into the material world.

The way the material, inanimate, purchasable things in Rhys's fiction contribute to its affectivity shows the stories' complex relations with pleasure, happiness, and empathy. On the basis of this reading, the affective whole changes and some new shades of happiness, belonging and empathy emerge beside grim and ironical tones. At the same time, paradoxically, the issue of agency discussed in the previous chapter becomes more complex as even objectified characters come across as agent-like, mimetically identifiable, lived bodies, in all their thing-likeness. Rhys's stories allow for and even invite a reading in which immersion in material pleasures and critical irony go side by side, and can be experienced simultaneously. Human and nonhuman bodies become intermingled and take various positions of subjects and objects, and their affective encounters are enacted in encounters between the body of the reader and the body of the text.

89 A sociological-phenomenological notion defined as interaction in which the other parties appear as objects, be they human or material things ("the nonconscious engagement in the course of social interaction that occurs within a social field that is phenomenally objective for subjects and that includes interactions with objects." (Gordon & Moghaddam 2014; see also Morton 2013).

## 4.2 The Materiality of Affect in Djuna Barnes's Stories

Compared to Rhys's sparing, restrained and even sardonic presentation of emotion, Djuna Barnes's "passionate prose" (Miller 1999, 121) bulges with dramatic affectivity, grand gestures, and intense pleasures. In the preceding chapters, we have already seen how Barnes's work challenges received ideas of time, space, subjectivity, and agency by presenting abundant descriptions of detail, underneath which her characters, events and plots occasionally seem to be buried. Julie Taylor argues convincingly that Barnes's writing acts within canonized high modernism as a reminder of the embodied sides of reading. As formulated by Taylor, "Rather than leading her reader along the route of *making sense,* Barnes encourages her reader to just *sense*" (2012, 87). 'Sense', as meaning or significance, is often elusive in Barnes's stories. However ambivalent, her texts are affective in a performative manner: they do things to words and bodies. As embodied and sensory, affects in Barnes's work circulate between human, nonhuman, and textual bodies, including inanimate objects and the text itself as a material entity. Further, according to Taylor, Barnes presents us with "mixed feelings": even the expressions of trauma and shame are intermingled with traces of pleasure and happiness, and sometimes positive affect (itself already mixed) is all there is to be found in the text (Ibid. 74–109). This study shares the central points of departure with Taylor's work, while the aim is to complement the discussion of Barnes's "affective modernism," with a demonstration of how central material, "lived" things are to it.

I begin by exploring the evocations of touching and the sense of touch in the texts, connecting affectivity with the haptic sensation of tangible textures and surfaces that Barnes introduces in her stories. The focus is on how she uses touch to construct the affective whole of the work and to situate its characters on an axis of subject—object, or to disrupt the conception of such axis. Other senses have their parts to play as well, but touch has a clear priority. The second section discusses gestures that involve material objects, and the use of objects as gestures, treating them as a special case of how things are used to

transfer affects in the stories. The final section is about pleasure in relation to material things. By this I mean instances of bodily pleasure evoked by way of things, pleasurable mergers of bodies and things, and possibilities of readerly pleasure in thing-like textual features. The readings show how the affectivity central to Barnes's modernism is clearly located between humans and things, and how it challenges their separate treatment and conventional classification into subjects and objects.

### 4.2.1. Touching Things: Two Affective Journeys

Touching is one of the ways available for sensing surfaces and textures that remind us of the materiality of whatever it is we encounter. In her introduction to the suggestively named work *Touching Feeling*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, iobserves that "a particular intimacy seems to subsist between textures and emotions" (Sedgwick 2003, 17).[90] 'Touching' and 'being touched' refer to physical contact, but also, as bodily metaphors, to emotional effects; like 'feeling' and 'moving' (Sedgwick 2003, 17; Stewart 2002, 162). Physically speaking, when a human agent touches a material thing, touching and being touched occur simultaneously to both parties in the event, and consequently it becomes harder to distinguish between the subject and object, active and passive party of the event, even though the two surfaces touching one another remain separate instead of merging together (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 133, 147; Ahmed 2006, 106).[91] Thus, as Susan Stewart puts it, touch "traverses the boundary between interiority and externality" (Stewart 2002, 178); or in Sedgwick's words, it "makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity" (Sedgwick 2003, 14). When I touch the surface of a cloth, I am simultaneously touched by it. An object repositions itself as a subject by doing something to me. In a number of mythological sources, the action of touch is a magical cause for the animation of inanimate things. It can be a means to experience one's own body as other (Barad 2015, 1; cf. Stewart 2002, 163, 178); on the other hand, touching things and the sense of resistance they offer is seen to be partly responsible for the experience of embodied subjectivity and its corporeal boundaries (Colombetti 2013, 9). In Barnes's texts, touch is used to construct characters and evoke a sense of their bodily being as well as to blur their

90 Sedgwick notes that visual and aural senses are also involved in the perception of texture (ibid, 15).

91 In cases of touching between human beings, power issues, for instance, make the questions of agency and passivity more complex. Equally, when heat or cold is sensed as tactual sensation, the "object" is not necessarily in immediate contact with the perceiver (Ratcliffe 2012, 417–418). The *sensation* on a minimal level is of most interest here: the encounter of surfaces, which is more or less similar in both human-human and human-thing encounters.

subjective boundaries and to locate them as embedded in a vibrant material world, grasped (to use another haptic metaphor) by a reader by way of haptic bodily imagination.

In Barnes's short stories, certain patterns appear repeatedly in relation to touching. Characters are most often found touching different types of clothes, a bias noticed above in the discussion of Jean Rhys's work. There is a plausible explanation for this in the way clothes constantly provide sensations of touch for the human beings who wear them, which makes them useful as literary means of evoking sensations in the reader. Some items of clothing, such as boots, gloves, pieces of lace and jewelry, come up as especially charged, and their fetish qualities were already explored in Chapter 3.2. We have also noticed how tactility and affectivity have a role in the specific type of fetishism that Barnes employs.

Such fetish objects have a special role in the two stories discussed here. "Spillway" and "Aller et Retour" both begin with an unconventional homecoming of a mother and a transgenerational encounter that is shadowed by death, in the first case an approaching, in the second a recent one. These concrete and metaphorical journeys are formulated on the level of narrative discourse as a succession of clothes and accessories to be put on and removed, and as different surfaces to be touched with gloved or bare hands. Such construction of sensory progression is crucial for the experience of reading the story, and for its potential of affective involvement. Even if the visual sense has a priority for humans and may dominate the cognitive experience of reading, haptic imagination also plays a part (Cave 2016, 35). I suggest that the composition of several of Barnes's stories relies on a series of fictional stimuli for haptic experience. As Susan Lohafer (1983, 159) observes, short stories often invite their readers to go through an experience. This is true to all art and literature, but more pronounced in the short prose form. Furthermore, in the modernist context, there is a tendency to view an artwork as a "series of impulses and shocks, assaulting the nerves" (Armstrong 2005, 94).[92]

At the beginning of "Spillway," Julie and Ann, the mother and the daughter coming from the tuberculosis sanatorium, are traveling in a carriage toward the house of Julie's husband. Their illness manifests itself in synchronized coughing fits. Its bodily location is pointed at by details of Julie's clothing that evoke haptic sensations: "She took

92 In Armstrong's argument, this tendency is attributed especially to futurism, which strives toward a new human created by these impulses and shocks. However, as has been noted before, Barnes's texts have similar aspirations, visible in the way they challenge notions of subjectivity, identity and interiority as well as the boundary between human and nonhuman (cf. Section 2.1).

a deep breath, stretching the silk of her shirtwaist across her breasts" (*CS*, 268). When Julie speaks for the first time, in a short affirmative to the driver, she raises her face "from her collar" and nods (*CS*, 268). A succession of gestures performed by the child and an ermine muff follows.[93] When they reach the destination, Julie picks Ann up from the carriage, "thrusting her black gloved hands under the child" (*CS*, 269). The movement of the hands seems rapid and slightly violent ("thrusting"), and they are denoted as being one with the black gloves covering them, whose color is transferred to an attribute of the hands. The blackness forms a parallel with the black horses (a standard motif in Barnes) in front of the carriage, and so becomes associated with muscular power that agrees with the force of "thrusting." Combined with the allusions to illness, the color of the hands and the horses contribute to a gloomy overall mood. The child has already been cast as fragile and pale from the illness she is carrying, while Julie seems to be a combination of frailty and exploding strength.[94] The gloves come between the mother and the child, but more as an object incorporated in the sensation than as a boundary.

They enter the house and meet the husband, Paytor, who is aware neither that his wife is coming home, nor that she has a child. Ann is sent away and Paytor begins to grasp the situation. After a heated exchange of Paytor's moralist accusations and Julie's musings on death, guilt and mercy that reach rather abstract heights, he disappears in anger into his shooting loft and she is left leaning on her hand by the window, seeing, hearing, and smelling the world outside and inside. The different senses are painstakingly evoked in this passage:

> Darkness was closing in, it was eating away the bushes and the barn, and it rolled in the odors of the orchard. Julie leaned on her hand by the casement edge and listened. She could hear far off the faint sound of dogs, the brook running down the mountain, and she thought, "Water in the hand has no voice, but it really roars coming over the falls. It sings over small stones in brooks, but it only tastes of water when it's caught, struggling and running away in the hands." [...]. She could hear Paytor walking on the thin boards above, she could smell the smoke of his tobacco, she could hear him slashing the cocks of his guns. (*CS*, 275–276)

Together, the senses create a synesthetic experience: a sense of natural texture that constitutes an affective whole is conveyed by a combination of vision, sound, touch and smell out of which Julie composes the aphoristic emblem about running water. It can be related to Julie's own

93 These gestures are investigated in more detail in the following section.

94 Susan Sontag has famously explored the habitual metaphorical connections of tuberculosis with unexpressed passion (Sontag 1978).

situation, in which she is "caught" and "struggling," and it evokes the dichotomy of natural and artificial, inside and outside that recurs in Barnes's writing even though always in a mixed and ambiguous form.

Between sensations, Julie encounters remembrances:

> Tears came into her eyes, but they did not fall. Sentimental memories of childhood, she said to herself, which had sometimes been fearful, and had strong connections with fishing and skating, and the day they had made her kiss the cheek of their dead priest—Qui habitare facit sterilem—matrem filiorum laetantem—then Gloria Patri—that had made her cry with a strange backward grief that was swallowed, because in touching his cheek, she kissed aggressive passivity, entire and cold. (*CS*, 276)

The static moment in the movement of the main character in the fictional space leads her to an imaginary space that evokes powerful experiences and metaphorical references to various directions, including the Catholic faith. Brief mentions of active childhood life lead to a macabre image of touching between active youth and passive death. The Latin verses from Psalm 112 are closely tied to the content of the story, with a slight dose of morbid irony: "He maketh the barren woman to keep house: and to be a joyful mother of children."[95] Julie has survived long past the time her doctors have expected her to have left, and she has even given birth to a child, yet there seems to be no joy, nor a possibility of "keeping house," as Julie's life is marked by absence from home, her husband seems to reject her and the house itself as a lived space shifts and merges with the world of textures outside.

Metaphors, emblems, and memories that rely on haptic experience are followed by the action of touching in the storyworld, as Julie starts to move around the room again. She walks "mechanically" to a chest and begins to rummage through the items of clothing it contains: "She turned over the upper layer of old laces and shawls until she came to a shirtwaist of striped silk … the one she had worn years ago, it had been her mother's. She stopped" (Ibid.). The things are shown to lead to memories while the accumulated thoughts linked to motherhood lead Julie to worry about Ann and Paytor. Here she takes off her gloves, and the way she wonders about not having done that before may surprise a reader with a realization that she has been wearing them throughout the previous descriptions of actual and imagined touching. The gloves have been incorporated in all the previous

95 From *The Book of Common Prayer* (orig. 1662).

sensations, and the intensity of these sensations can be seen as saved in the motif of the gloves. Removing them exposes Julie's hands to even more acute sensation. She tries to think of what to do and what to say to Paytor, becoming more upset. The intensity of Julie's feelings might be difficult to comprehend on psychological terms, as the case often seems to be in Barnes's work: there is excessive affectivity but no conceptualized "explanation" for it (see Taylor 2012, 152–157). The feeling is there, available to readers for grasping and reacting to, in the heated thoughts and sensations evoked in the text. There is a space for embodied projection into the fictional world, but not much for psychological interpretation of certain emotions. The thoughts narrated and affects evoked do not even always fit together, but the affectivity still "makes sense" in the context of the story.

It is possible to read Julie's character in a naturalizing manner, in the sense of attributing her an interiority or personhood composed of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and intentions, and besides understanding all of these as fictional constructions (Palmer 2004, 38). In such an approach, following a cognitive-behavioral paradigm of the psychology of emotions, emotion is connected causally with beliefs or judgments and thus can be demonstrated as plausible or not: "cognition causes emotion" (Ibid., 116; see also 113). Barnes's stories seem to resist this paradigm, not only in that cognitive states leading to emotion are not described, but in that such states do not provide a cause or a justification for the overall affectivity presented. However, the lack of cause does not diminish the affects. They seem to resonate in the text, between its animate, inanimate, concrete and abstract subjects and objects.

The story takes the reader along in its frenzy of affect that may lead to dizziness such as described in its final paragraphs. According to Susan Stewart, dizziness resembles touch as a threshold activity in which "subjectivity and objectivity come quite close to each other" (Stewart 2002, 178). Dizziness is the absence of the grounding effect of touch, an "ek-static" state of lost contact with the body. On the other hand, it can be described as a state in which the body becomes exaggeratedly material but separate from the mind, causing an experiential enforcement of the Cartesian dichotomy that is actually absent from most everyday lived experience. Dizziness is evoked at the ending of "Spillway":

> What could she do, for God's sake, what was there that she could do? [...] "Because I am cold I can't think. I'll think soon. I'll take my jacket off, put on my coat..."
>
> She got up, running her hand along the wall. Where was it? Had she left it on the chair?
>
> "I can't think of the word," she said, to keep her mind on something. [...] She became dizzy.
>
> "It's because I must get on my knees. But it isn't low enough," she contradicted herself, "but if I put my head down, way down—down, down, down, down..."

She heard a shot. "He has quick warm blood—"
Her forehead had not quite touched the boards,
now it touched them, but she got up immediately,
stumbling over her dress. (*CS*, 277–278)

In Julie's experience, thinking and doing, abstract ideas and embodied actions, seem to fly in different directions, up and "down, down, down, down," while feelings hover in between. Her feeling of cold could be another expression of the sense of disembodiment and dizziness. In the conceptual metaphors that involve verticality, a reader can recognize the dualistic, folk-psychological idea of mind and body as separate, vertically arranged areas, yet at the same time the text counterintuitively complicates this vein of thinking. The Cartesian dualism becomes fuzzy, but the story makes sense, if we consider its affectivity to arise from the sensation of the materiality of the things. The illness, the child, the house of the husband and all the material things that Julie touches make an assemblage that drags her down and makes her dizzy; Julie is not only feeling her environment and thinking about it, but "feeling with" and "thinking with" it, looking for her coat not as a metaphor but as a means of looking for answers, and perhaps the socially "right" emotion that she does not seem to be able to find for a situation that transgresses the norms of marriage and family, and even life and death.[96]

The previous passages have offered the reader some scenes of touching, both actual and imagined by the character, to be interpreted more or less symbolically in relation to illness, death and motherhood: the water in the hands, kissing the cheek of the dead priest with its Latin accompaniments, the mother's shirtwaist, the forehead on the floorboards. During all this, Julie has had her gloves on. In the last passage, however, the symbolic meanings that could be reached by thinking have escaped, and her hands are bare. Julie's body seems to struggle for balance and to replace *thinking* by *doing*. Approached thus, the jacket, the coat, the wall, the chair, the floorboards, and the dress refuse to yield completely to symbolism, and to provide themselves chiefly as surfaces to be touched. These gestures have been ways of indicating the culmination, the shot she hears, which also gives an explosive justification to the heat of emotion (parallel with the "warm blood"), although inverse in terms of the order of events in the narrative discourse.[97]

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96 The problematic relationship between feelings and their acceptable meaning is also vocalized by Julie: "Torment should have meaning" (*CS*, 272).

97 The event of the shot has of course been worked toward in the narrative, with a literal use of the classic device of "Chekhov's gun": Paytor is heard pacing in his "shooting loft," there is a smell of (tobacco) smoke in the air. However, these hints do not seem to suggest danger to Julie; they are presented as mere distractions to her thoughts, not stimuli for more worry.

Kneeling and bowing are also central motifs in *Nightwood* (with its chapter titles "Bow Down" and "Go Down, Matthew"). In "Spillway," the gesture of bowing down is also an action afforded by the form of the story, the tragic culmination that Barnes teasingly leaves slightly twisted, even awkward, like Julie's gesture of repentance that has not quite finished before it falls apart in her stumbling: has someone been shot and died, is there a punishment or a redemption? All is left open and conceptual explanations miss their mark, yet the affective composition has grasped something that resonates phenomenologically with readers. Julie kneels before no one, for a reason that remains unclear just as we remain unable to provide names or psychological causes for her emotions. There is a socioculturally normative assumption of what she is supposed to feel, yet this does not seem to work: she tries out a gesture of repentance, but its failure and the image of her stumbling creates something else, an affective surplus. Psychological interpretations simply stop short and fail to grasp the affective assemblage that the passage creates.

How, then, do the things actually contribute to the understanding of affectivity at the end of "Spillway?" According to David Herman (2011, 253), modernist narratives suggest that "mental states have the character they do because of the world in which they arise, as a way of responding to possibilities (and exigencies) for acting afforded by that world." Touching creates feeling, feeling ignites movement that results in another encounter with a surface, and so on, in a circle of affectivity that is afforded—and constrained—by the lived world of Julie and Paytor, with its normativities. Among the features of the world are, then, also Julie's memories of her mother and childhood, which it would be tempting to pick up as clues to a deeper significance in a psychoanalytical frame. Nevertheless, the text does not let readers linger on the mother or the memory of the priest, but presents them, as it were, on the surface of a table as objects of equal value with the gloves and the floorboards. Thus, the text leans more in the direction of the interpretation of the unconscious proposed by Thomas Fuchs, following Merleau-Ponty, as a property of the lived body and the actions it takes and omits in the lived, intercorporeal space, rather than one of an interior psyche (Fuchs 2012, 75; Merleau-Ponty 1968).

The affective content circulates between things, involves readers, and leaves them with no clear meaning or explanation, but a sense of having touched something beside the book-object they are holding. According to Cheryl Plumb (1986, 65), readers are inclined to be sympathetic to Paytor as the one who has been wronged in the story. However, they are invited to "go through" Julie's confused and confusing feelings that arise in interaction with the material world around her. Julie is the focalizer of the story, while Paytor remains a distant and almost archetypical character, standing for the patriarch around whom the whole scheme of family crumbles, like the roof of their living-room. I suggest that a reader may not feel *for* either of the characters, but the affective structure of the story is a strong invitation to feel *with* Julie, even if only by imaginatively engaging

with the fictional surfaces she touches. Narrative empathy is given a chance to appear thorough the way the lived world and its lived things are shared.

"Aller et Retour," as its name suggests, is also constructed around a journey, this time there and back. As in "Spillway," the journey is defined by haptic and affective elements alike, as well as the gestures of taking off and putting on clothes. The narrative begins with a woman on a train from Marseilles to Nice. To be more exact, readers are first given the train, then told that it "had on board a woman of great strength" (*CS*, 362). The woman, Madame Erling von Bartmann ("Russian, a widow" who lives in Paris) is firmly located in and tightly framed by her material surroundings. Her "great strength" is made tangible in her contact with clothes and other things:

> Her bosom was tightly cross-laced, the busk bending with every breath, and as she breathed and moved she sounded with many chains in coarse gold links, the ring of large heavily set jewels marking off her lighter gestures. (Ibid.)

Madame has "tan boots laced high on shapely legs" and she "control[s] the jarring of her body with the firm pressure of her small plump feet against the rubber matting" (Ibid.). In the space of half a page, the reader of the story is already presented with a tightly packaged parcel of a character, with the sense of a muscular, heavy body resonating in contact with a multitude of materials around it.

As Madame von Bartmann leaves the train in Marseilles, a cavalcade of experiences for different senses begins. "[N]oting every object," holding her skirts, she goes from "foul odors" of side streets, by a woman in a doorway "holding a robin loosely in one huge plucking hand," to a ship-chandler's, where she "smell[s] the tang of tarred rope" and on to a side alley, where she "touche[s] the satins of vulgar, highly colored bedspreads" laid out for sale (*CS*, 363). Again, readers encounter many sensory experiences, but their affective significance for the character remains obscure. This, at first, seems to be quite the opposite of what happens in "Spillway." Madame von Bartmann as a focalizer is, insofar as possible, a detached observer. Readers are only told that she "looked neither pleased nor displeased" (Ibid.). Her fictional body is lent for the reader as a virtual body to imagine with, but at the same time her thoughts and emotions are silenced. When she reaches her hotel, the narrator reports that she is "trying to think," while removing her clothes and washing her hands with a "large oval of coarse red soap" (*CS*, 364). Things and their haptic, visual or olfactory qualities are precisely and experientially described and graspable, and we are invited to attribute a consciousness to Madame

von Bartmann, even if the alleged contents her psychological mind is out of reach; her thoughts refuse to be formulated completely, apart from the effort of "trying to think" that resonates with Julie's struggles at the end of "Spillway." Madame von Bartmann is constructed as another character whose mind, or what is most often described as the *cognitive* part of it, is unattainable for the narrator and the reader, but whose experience can be to some extent imagined via the embodied expression of her body and a reader's mimetic engagement with it.

The following day, before reaching her destination, the house on the outskirts of Nice, Madame von Bartmann visits a church, and again like Julie, kneels down: "She turned the stones of her rings out and put her hands together, the light shining between the little fingers; raising them she prayed, with all her vigorous understanding, to God, for a common redemption" (Ibid.). This is the first idea of the content of her thoughts that readers are given, and it seems to resonate strongly with "Spillway," in its abstract grandeur and indication of the longing for an abstract forgiveness expressed by the kneeling posture. After she has got up, "feeling the stuff of the altar-cloth,"[98] the narrative jumps to Nice and the gate of the garden around her house, which she opens "with a large iron key" (Ibid.). In the garden she meets her daughter. This meeting, like almost everything that has preceded it, is mute, mediated by a thing—and a glove—and without psycho-narration or other references to nameable emotions: "She still held the key to the gate in her gloved hand, and the seventeen-year-old girl who came up from a bush took hold of it, walking beside her" (*CS*, 365). Madame von Bartmann has been first introduced as an object seen from without, and now her daughter emerges from a bush, as tightly connected with her surroundings as the mother, and grasping at the same thing, the key. It is easy to see that Barnes suggests a version of an oedipal scheme, a composition that involves a mother, a daughter, and a phallic object. Chapter 5 will examine how Barnes's texts reinvent Freudian motifs and dynamics, but at the same time construct dead ends for interpreters keen to make psychoanalytical excavations for meaning. This section sets grounds for this argument.

In fact, the triadic composition is not static, nor are its components strictly recognizable as separate units. They become enmeshed in each other as well as embedded in the textures of the garden and the shifting positions of bodies and things inside and outside the house. In the garden, the mother and daughter have conversations; now a level of abstraction is introduced, some of Madame von Bartmann's thoughts are revealed and even some recognizable emotions are displayed (here the content of the discussions receives less attention, as they are taken up again in Section 5.1). The characters' gestures,

98 Touch and prayer, conventionally brought together in rituals such as a rosary, are more unconventionally combined in other Barnes's stories as well, such as "Renunciation" and most notably "No-Man's-Mare." In the latter story, the sister of a dead woman grappling with her loss is shown "touching things, vases, candlesticks, tumblers, knives, forks, the holy pictures and statues and praying to each of them, praying for a great thing, to many presences." (*CS*, 135)

however, are relevant for the section at hand. First, the mother answers Richter's questions about Marseilles (not very large but dirty) and Paris ("Paris was Paris") while sitting down on a knoll "warm with tempered grass" that Richter begins to pluck (*CS*, 366).[99] The following, now explicitly affective exchange is framed once again with gestures that involve gloves:

> Madame von Bartmann drew off one of her tan gloves, split at the turn of the thumb, and stopped for a moment before she said: "Well, now that your father is dead—"
>
> The child's eyes filled with tears; she lowered her head.
>
> "I come flying back," Madame von Bartmann continued good-naturedly, "to look at my own. Let me see you," she continued, turning the child's chin up in the palm of her hand. "Ten, when I last saw you, and now you are a woman." With this she dropped the child's chin and put on her glove. (*CS*, 366–367)

Unlike Julie, Madame von Bartmann takes off her glove to touch her child and examine her face. The recent death of the father is mentioned, and this brings out an affective response in the child. The mother's response is from a different world and continues her portrayal as strong, brisk, and detached: she talks in a "good-natured," imperative tone, picks up the child's chin in a gesture of quite detached examination, only to "drop" it again right away. If there was for a moment a direct contact between two skins, coinciding with an affective burst on the other's part, the more neutral state and a focus on the touch of skin and fabric, human and thing, is restored as the hand returns to the glove.

Madame von Bartmann behaves toward her daughter more or less in the same indifferent yet interested manner she takes toward all things. This, however, does not come across in a scandalous or tragic tone. Richter is said to be seventeen at the moment of the encounter. Therefore, the mother has been absent for quite a significant time, which partly explains the distance and discomfort built between the characters, and adds to the reader's possible uncertainty as to how they will interact. The period of absence is not explained, and readers are not provided with any hints for the interpretation of its significance: it is in no way presented as a tragic motif, as one would perhaps expect a mother's prolonged absence to be, especially with the death of the father. This is another example of the stories' apparent incompatibility of form and content, affect and circumstance, which

99 Certainly, another sexualized metaphor.

reflects a rebellious attitude especially in relation to family norms.

Some more discussions, or rather Madame's lessons in life given to Richter as a passive listener, are interrupted by a scene with Madame playing the piano ("the sparkles of her jewelled fingers bubbled over the keys") and Richter listening in the garden, "shiver[ing] in the fur coat that touched the chill of her knees." Later, Richter plays, "touchingly, with frail legs pointed to the pedals, [...] with thin technique and a light touch" (*CS*, 371). The mother and the daughter are set as opposites: heavy, sparkling, and round versus light, frail, and thin; warmth versus chill, and Schubert versus Beethoven. All this is done with the help of haptic expression: a coat touching knees, fingers touching keys and feet touching pedals, all of which result in "touching" music. The gestures of touching reach mostly toward things, and from the story toward the reader, while the two characters remain distant from one another. The narrator reports that for the next few days Richter avoids her mother, and then suddenly announces her engagement to an older neighbor. Madame von Bartmann has urged her child to experiment and experience the beauty and ugliness of life, an ambition that now seems to be thwarted with the engagement. An ellipsis replaces the event of the wedding and the "retour" closes the story in a similar passive description as the beginning of the "aller":

> Within two months Madame von Bartmann was
> once again in her travelling clothes, hatted and veiled,
> strapping her umbrella as she stood on the platform [...].
>
> Once the train was in motion, Madame Erling von
> Bartmann slowly drew her gloves through her hand, from
> fingers to cuff, stretching them firmly across her knee.
>
> "Ah, how unnecessary." (*CS*, 373)

Madame von Bartmann is "hatted and veiled" and placed on the platform as if making visible the hand of the author that has again packaged her in her clothes and placed her there to be transported. The story ends with another gesture of the gloves from the paradoxically strong and passive lady, who utters a sigh and expresses her feeling of pointlessness. The feeling behind the sigh is again expressed as (hatted and) veiled, unnamed and somatic, something to grasp by taking in the pointed event of drawing the gloves through the hand and stretching them across the knee. The story invites its reader to linger on this image.

"Spillway" and "Aller et Retour" are narrated as a succession of *tableaux vivants*. Their characters are set in a variety of situations, in relation to and affected by different others in the form of characters or things. In "Spillway," there is much passionate feeling. This feeling, however, seems exaggerated and disconnected from the story and its characters, if it is read through naturalizing or conventionalizing lenses, looking for unity of content and form, credible causality, or imaginable minds. In "Aller et Retour," the principal feeling is perhaps one of strain and tension. Its affectivity is constrained by corset laces

and tight boots, but emerges in sudden sparks, when different materials come into contact with one another. None of the affective flashes in the two stories have their grounds in a clearly imaginable mental state of a character. I argue that to do justice to the texts, such grounds need not necessarily be looked for. The idea that fictional things function as symbolic or metonymical representations of emotional states that can ultimately be attributed to a character, applies here even less than in relation to Rhys's stories. Terence Cave (2016, 38) describes a poem in a way that could also be applied to the two stories: it is not a "rarefied conceptual thing, a creature of the transcendental imagination," but "an ingenious gadget, or a small, compact box that delivers, when one opens it, an explosive cocktail of responses."

This cryptic unreachability of Barnes's characters has been characterized by Deborah Parsons as follows:

> Her protagonists resemble silhouettes, or marionettes, who present angular and impenetrable exteriors. Often bizarre and emotionally or physically abusive, and frequently involved in mysterious relationships of strange intensity, they seem to respond to forces which remain inaccessible to the reader. (Parsons 2003, 23)

H. Porter Abbott suggests that characters with "unreadable" minds tend to be "naturalized" or made more readable by classifying them as types, catalysts for understanding other characters, or symbolic (Ibid., 450–452). Such characters, he suggests, are even more common in short stories than in novels, and they appear as poetic images less than parts of a whole fictional world. In short fiction, they usually seem to call for a symbolic reading (Abbott 2008, 458–459). There are undeniably symbolic dimensions to Julie, Ann, Paytor, Madame von Bartmann and Richter. However, neither symbolism nor typification suffices as an explanation for the *affectivity* of the characters, and as Abbott notes, such explanations should not "displace the experience of unreadability" (Ibid., 463), which is ultimately experience of the unattainable other. As I have suggested here, the *minds* of the characters may be *unreadable* and other, but the characters remain to some extent open for the reader's experience, like the dresses that elicit forms of empathy from Rhys's characters and potentially her readers. They function in the stories as bodies that react to other bodies in a shared, lived world, whereby the line between character and thing becomes quite thin. Despite all this, the texts remain affective and, to a certain extent, experiential. Other narratological approaches drawing from cognitive sources that allow for such experientiality (see, for instance, Fludernik 2003), or underline *action* instead of character: we can even go back to Aristotle and find him stating that "you could not

have a tragedy without action, but you can have one without character-study" (Aristotle 1932, 1450a; quoted in Jannidis 2013).

In "Mother," Lydia Passova's lover voices the impenetrability of Barnes's characters by separating bodily expression from meaning: "[…] my tears are nothing, have no significance, they are just a protective fluid—when I see anything happening that is about to affect my happiness I cry, that's all" (*CS*, 304). The tears are related to a state of things that affects the character, but they are a surface phenomenon. According to Kukkonen and Caracciolo (2014, 261), characters' fictional minds should be considered as embedded in the material and social reality, and engaged in by readers with embodied reactions. Furthermore, even cognitive schemes thus brought in closer contact with the lived body and the material world do not suffice to explain the actions and emotions of Madame von Bartmann and Richter, Julie and Paytor. The affective states of Barnes's characters are not inner states of characters, but rather "states of things" in the world. The texts remain affective, even when a reader can have a hard time accounting for the affectivity by way of any imaginary idea of the mind or subjectivity of a character. In Barnes's case, it might simply be too much to ponder upon characters as minded subjects at all: they are bodies with agency, but so are the inanimate objects surrounding them in assemblages often organized as *tableaux*.[100] Their human form lends them as virtual bodies ready for readerly imagination and experience, but otherwise their experientiality actually remains quite minimal.

Barnes's characters as affective beings "make sense" as sensing bodies that act and react to touching other bodies, animate or inanimate. Their senses, of course, are produced by the imagination of a reader, and their affectivity is produced in the encounter between two further bodies in an assemblage: the reader's and the text's. The event of touching always has two subjects, either animate or inanimate. Thus, the imagined interiority of the characters begins to matter less. It is equally possible to produce affect between text and reader by reporting the touch of two materials, as it would be by attributing a "natural" mind and emotions to these materials. The characters' affectivity is constructed by an imaginary puppeteer-author who moves them in relation to one another and selected objects. Their surfaces meet, they move each other while being moved. When they function as agents in a text, in its assemblages, both are capable of producing experiences.



100 Abstract ideas and intertextual references can be, as has been suggested above, added to this list of agents, but they will be discussed more closely in the following chapter.

### 4.2.2. Gesturing with Things

The importance of gestures has already been hinted at earlier in the discussion of "Spillway" and "Aller et Retour." Clothes are the most common things to gesture with in these stories. To begin the analysis of how things mediate or create affects through gestures in other stories, I take another look at the beginning of "Spillway," in which the mother and daughter, Julie and Ann, journey toward the house, and Ann's activities with the ermine muff. This luxurious item of clothing is described as "old-fashioned," and it seems to be out of place in the "heat of noon" in which the mother and daughter are said to be traveling (*CS*, 266–267). Because of these characterizations, it attracts attention as a means of expression rather than a necessary item of clothing. Like other objects in the stories, it also has playful sexual innuendoes, hinting at female external genitals, but its use as an affective gesture is not completely dependent on these meanings.

Julie is discussing local events with the driver and becomes agitated by suspected corruption. The child responds with fear and curiosity, after which Julie attempts to distract her:

> "[...] I said, all is lost from the beginning,
> if we only knew it—always."
> The child looked up at her, then down into her muff.
> "Ann," said Julie Anspacher suddenly,
> lifting the muff away from the child. "Did
> you ever see such big horses before?"
> The child turned her head with brightness and
> bending down tried to see between the driver's arms.
> "Are they yours?" she whispered.
> "[...] no, they are not mine, but we
> have two—bigger—blacker— "
> "Can I see them?"
> "Of course you will see them—don't be ridiculous!"
> The child shrank into herself, clutching
> nervously at her muff. Julie Anspacher
> returned to her reflections. (*CS*, 267–268)

The sense of touch is not the only means by which the muff gains its affective associations. Ann is clutching the furry object for safety, and when her mother attempts to gain contact with her and perhaps cheer her up, she lifts off the muff, paradoxically removing the means to safety, too. Julie tries to interest Ann in the horses, although the large, black animals are quite a scary way to comfort a child. They

are almost in complete opposition to the child, who is determined by illness, frailty and whiteness (ermine muffs tend to be white and tuberculosis is also called "the white death"; the house they travel toward is white, too). Ann, however, seems excited to see their own horses. She is drawn to a common sphere of discussion by her excitement for just a moment, until Julie snaps at her about being ridiculous (a phrase she repeats later in the story), and she returns to the safety of the muff. The muff is not only a medium, but also a barrier in the affective exchange between mother and daughter, and for the child it seems to be the muff that equals safety and comfort, not the erratic mother.

The affective progression in this scene is very similar to the one in which Madame von Bartmann raises Richter's chin, yet another example of Barnes's ways of recycling and reworking formal and thematic material. Madame and Julie are unconventional, phallic mother figures characterized by sudden gestures. Their behavior toward their children mixes tender affection with a chilly attitude and an urge toward what is "frightful" in life, as Madame puts it (*CS*, 369). These are among many instances of Barnes rejecting conventional ideas of a heterosexual family and procreation (Caselli 2009, 4), and imagines new meanings for motherhood: openness, detachment, and support for freedom and exploration. The physical and verbal connections between mothers and daughters are cut short by a sudden line or gesture on the mothers' part, and the child's role remains to be puzzled by and alienated from the whole situation. What the mothers do and say is certainly central to the story, but the controversial nature of their characters is heightened by the thwarted relations they have with their children. The scene in "Spillway" shows once again how affectivity is created in between, this time in an assemblage that contains mother, daughter, muff and horses.

In "The Grande Malade," it is two daughters whose clothes become agents in expressive assemblages. Katya, the main character and narrator of this story in addition to "Cassation," "Dusie," and "Behind the Heart," is another Barnesian character who remains quite unattainable, this time also because of the embedded story structure in which she is narrating events that have occurred to her earlier (Parsons 2003, 4). Moydia, the sister about whom the story told by Katya, remains even further away. The sisters have a special way of wearing clothes as expressions of emotion or attitude, as well as talismanic fetish objects, as was observed in the previous chapter. Katya tells Madame:

> Now I have come to Paris and I respect Paris. First I respected it in a great hat. I am short and a great hat would not, you see, become me, but I wore it for respect. It was all a jumble of flowers and one limber feather; it stood out so that my face was in the middle of a garden. (*CS*, 394)

Katya explains that she does not wear the hat anymore, because she has begun to look back to her remembrance of her father, "his

astrakhan cap, his frogged coat, with all those silver buttons, and the tall shining boots that caught him just under the knee" (Ibid.). She continues:

> So now, out of respect for that man, I wear my hats small. Some day, when I have money, my shoes will be higher and come under my knee. This is my way, Madame, but it is not the way it is with Moydia. She has a *great memory in the present*, and it all turns about a cape, therefore now she wears a cape, until something yet more austere drives the cape away. (*CS*, 394–395, emphasis in the original)

Katya wears clothes based on attitudes such as respect; later, she is wears satin trousers "for respect to China" (*CS*, 196). Moydia, on the other hand, wears hers as expressions of an affective, qualitative state of being: "austere," for instance. The combination of abstract epithets and concrete objects into "a respectful hat" and "an austere cape" creates a comic tone that recalls surprising noun phrases such as "the sudden spoon" and "a method of a cloak" in Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* (Stein 2011, 12, 6). Both Stein's experiments from 1914 and Barnes's stories highlight objects as well as abstract definitions and concepts and literary formulations as expressive, not necessarily as symbolic or even representational (see Oulanne 2017a).

Moydia's affair with "Monsieur x" begins first to show in gestures that involve objects: "She sprinkled her sugar in her tea from too great a height" (*CS*, 396); "she was always kicking her feet in the air and tearing handkerchiefs and crying in her pillow" (Ibid.). Moydia also displays grand gestures that express abundant and contradictory emotions in her behavior toward him: "She flew at him then and pulled his clothes about and ripped his gloves, and said with absolute quiet: 'It amazes me how I do not love you'" (*CS*, 198). At home she is "put to bed" while crying: "I adore him!" (*CS*, 399). Moydia goes to Germany to see their father, and buys a dress fit for two purposes: "to please Monsieur x, and not to alarm father—all at the same time":

> So it was a cunning dress, very deft and touching. It was all dotted Suisse, with a very tight bodice, and into this bodice, just between the breasts, was embroidered, in very fine twist, a slain lamb. It might, you see, mean everything and it might mean nothing, and it might bring pleasure to both father and lover. *(CS*, 400)

The austere cape is preceded by a "cunning," "deft," and "touching" dress, the symbolic ambivalence of which the passage spells out. The dress carries a symbolic image of the slain lamb, but the text toys with attempts to interpret it symbolically: she declares that "it might mean everything and it might mean nothing." In Katya's narration, this ambivalence is actually the source of the cunning nature of the dress. Buying and wearing the dress are expressions and gestures in many directions at once: directed at the father and the lover and the world at large. As they appear in a narrative, they also become gestures directed by Katya at the narratee, Madame, and on to the reader of the short story. Both Madame and the reader become recipients of gestures that are bursting with affect, which might mean everything or nothing, but certainly express something, albeit contradictory and ambivalent.

As in "Spillway," a tragedy paradoxically seems to follow the outbursts of affect rather than give rise be to them in "The Grande Malade." Monsieur x has "caught a chill" and dies while Moydia is away. Katya goes to the house in which he has died, and is given his talismanic cape as a memento to give to Moydia. Upon her return, Moydia first weeps but then states quite enthusiastically: "Now I have a great life!" The next day she is already "quite well" (*CS*, 402). She wears the cape, but it seems to be a token of her "great life," and her own character as tragic, rather than a means of remembrance. Katya repeats the sugary metaphor in describing her sister: "She is gay, spoiled, *tragique.* She sugars her tea from far too great a height" (*CS*, 402–403). Monsieur x's newspaper obituaries all feature a photograph of him wearing the cape, which seems to please the sisters. As a symbol, the cape remains ambivalent, like so many things in the stories. As a gesture, it expresses the mixed feelings typical of Barnes's work: great tragic sorrow and earlier hysterical outbursts paired with light carelessness (sprinkling sugar from a height) and enjoyment of aesthetically or sensuously pleasing objects, not to forget the pleasure or amusement that the comic presentation of the story might provide its reader.

Julie Taylor's study warns against looking for explanations for affectivity in Barnes's biography, especially in theories of childhood trauma (Taylor 2012, 9–11). The author is not to be considered an authority who carries the final solution, the final meaning in her own history or her own body. Instead, we can follow Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his view that writers do not deliver messages; they make gestures (Merleau-Ponty 1974, 60; Gibbs 2010, 199). Dominic Head (1992, 11–12) connects a similar metaphor to short stories, describing their writing process as "something almost physical, the movement of the wrists." As I argue at length elsewhere (Oulanne 2017b), the biographical figure associated with the imagined body of Barnes can be seen as another fictional, affective body that participates in the phenomenon of reading along with the characters, although invisible but for the gestures of a mover behind the text. Like Monsieur x and Moydia, the biographical Barnes is shown in several photographs and caricatures wearing a great black cape. The cape as a signature garment is

Image 5. Berenice Abbott, 1920s: Djuna Barnes

also mentioned in bibliographical texts. Barnes's "picturesque" (Bruno 1987, 388) way of dressing and her "grande dame manner" (McAlmon 1968, 34, cited in Caselli 2009, 15) have been interpreted as elements in a masquerade (Cagidemetrio 1979, 28). The use of capes and cloaks in both her prose[101] and photographic portraits (see Image 5 below) suggests a game of pose and spontaneity, a playful performance of mystery and revelation that might or might not be about femininity and sexuality (Caselli 2009, 15, 28–29; see also Newman 2017, 148–150): "it might mean everything and it might mean nothing."

It is tempting to take Barnes's cape as a symbolic veil that covers the original meaning while alluringly gesturing toward it. This way the photographed cape would become a clue that could somehow lead to a secure clarification of meaning for the fictional capes. Nevertheless, the texts and pictures alike play with gestures, affectivity, quests for original meaning and the double nature of objects as material and symbolic. In "La Grande Malade," there is no final meaning, only gestures of veiling and unveiling. Great sorrow is replaced by great pleasure in the performance of wearing the cape and in planning another move abroad. This is the mixed sensation a reader is left with, in addition to photographs of capes on various levels of fictionality.

### 4.2.3. Pleasure in Things

Julie Taylor quotes Barnes's letter from 1957, in which she gives an incarnate definition for her writing: "[…] I'm not a 'writer'; once in every twenty years of so, the wound bleeds, that's all" (Djuna Barnes to Edwin Muir 26 October 1957, cited in Taylor 2012, 1). It would be easy to use this passage to label Barnes's work as (only) trauma writing, taking the author's word for it, as it were.[102] However, it can be read with the same mindset as the photographic evidence above: as a performance. Dramatically sinister one-liner statements form almost a trademark for Barnes. Deborah Parsons describes her outlook as "one of despair at the indifference, even malignancy, of the cosmos, to which the individual, failed by the inadequacy of both religious and psychoanalytical explanations of existence, could only respond with a bitter laugh and grotesque irony" (Parsons 2003, 5). Following

101 In addition to "The Grande Malade," at least" The Robin's House," the novel *Ryder* and many journalistic pieces feature capes and cloaks of some importance. See Caselli 2009, 16.

102 In English, 'trauma' is derived from the Greek for 'wound' or 'defeat' through the Latin 'physical wound'.

this, the bias in Barnes studies has been toward the grimmer sides of affectivity: pain, shame and trauma, excepting Taylor's reading of happiness and pleasure in *Ladies Almanack* and *Ryder* (Taylor 2012, 150). I aim to add more grounds for suggesting an alternative focus for trauma-based writing, departing from the very comment involving "the wound." Considering the imagery of Barnes's *oeuvre*, a bleeding wound need not be exclusively emblematic of trauma. Alternatively, it recalls the Sacred Heart of Roman Catholic iconography (a motif also present in "Aller et Retour"), *stigmata* and statues that miraculously exude. An occasionally bleeding wound can also refer to menstruation, which involves pain as well as the possibility of a new life and creativity. This reading of the wound suggests a further ambiguity in the ways Barnes's uses pain and pleasure in her fiction.

Positive emotions and affects, like the negative ones, are a conceptually complicated area. We can speak of 'pleasure', 'enjoyment', 'happiness', 'joy' (see Taylor 2012, 147). Out of these, only joy-enjoyment is on Tomkins's list of primary affects. It is defined as a counterbalance to excitement, a lessening of stimulation (Sedgwick & Frank 1995, 74, 81–105). Happiness usually implies a balanced serenity. Pleasure, on the other hand, has more explicit potential for intensity and excess: "Pleasure can get out of hand; happiness, never" (Frost 2013, 8). Pleasures in Barnes's work are often excessive and abundant, yet they lack the fearful, inhibiting character they have in Rhys's. In *Nightwood,* Barnes writes: "The unendurable is the beginning of the curve of joy" (*N*, 105). According to Laura Frost, modernist texts and their commentators tend to elevate difficult pleasure or "unpleasure" earned by way of skillful reading practices of "hostile" texts, that is, difficult ones in the sense of not being immersive or popular (Frost 2013, 20). Barnes's texts, on the other hand, have a distinctly different stance toward pleasure, although her work is located—also by her own commentary—within high modernism (Taylor 2012, 158).

We have encountered some instances of pleasure in the preceding analyses of Barnes's stories. "The Robin's House" introduces Nelly Grissard, a character who has several properties in common with Rhys's Fifi. She is a wealthy, large and bold woman who indulges in fashion, food, and other material pleasures:

> Every ounce of Nelly Grissard was on the jump. Her fingers tapped, her feet fluttered, her bosom heaved; her entire diaphragm swelled with little creakings of whale-bone, lace and taffeta.
>
> She wore feathery things about the throat, had a liking for deep burgundy silks, and wore six petticoats for the "joy of discovering that I'm not so fat as they say." (*CS*, 308)

The outline of Nelly's body and especially her chest, a part of the body that is often experienced as the locus of emotional experience, is highlighted experientially by items of clothing, as were those of Madame von Bartmann and Julie. Unlike in their cases, Nelly's tastes and her

enjoyment of the clothes she is wearing are brought to the fore. Her active, lived body that takes pleasure in itself is cast as an exquisite thing, covered enjoyably with excessive amounts of luxurious fabric. Nelly's late French husband, on the other hand, is described as someone who "had dragged his nationality about with him with the melancholy of a man who had half-dropped his cloak and that cloak his life, and in the end, having wrapped it tightly about him, had departed as a Frenchman should" (*CS,* 308–309). These excerpts show Barnes's recycling of motifs and compositions: swelling chest under whale-bone, a cloak, a strong widow and a weak late husband, a blend of nationalities, "half-dropping" a piece of attire. The clothes are prominent and the woman is powerful, made more powerful by the use of their talismanic fetishism; the man has disappeared.

Nelly resembles a female Des Esseintes, a decadent eccentric hero who has had different "periods" of tastes: a Russian, a Greek and a Chinese one, as well as a period of coloring her drinking water green (*CS,* 311). She does not fear ageing, and the narrator deems such fear a sign of a "decaying mind" (*CS,* 312). The narrator describes her as a "sentimentalist" (*CS,* 309) and "depraved," "if depravity is understood to be the ability to enjoy what others shudder at, and to shudder at what others enjoy" (*CS,* 311). This makes Nelly an "affect alien," like some of Rhys's heroines, yet the choices of words suggest that here, too, the question is not only about taste but also embodied, sensory and affective experience. The text uses words such as "depravity" and "decaying," but delivers them in a cheerful, comical tone. Further, the story repeats the decadent trope of abundance in pleasures, but by the focus on the enjoying body brings it out of the darkness that seems to surround decadent pleasures in the history of literature, into the chiaroscuro of sensory experience that a reader may enactively live through.

In the slapstick plot of the story, Nicholas, one of Nelly's two lovers, ignites a rumor that he has killed himself. The news is delivered to Nelly by the other lover, Nord, while Nicholas spies behind the door. The aim is to see how Nelly will react, to disclose any feelings she might still have for Nicholas, who has fallen out of favor. First, Nelly has a grand reaction typical of Barnes, but equally typically it fades into thin air. Nicholas accidentally makes a noise with his cane, then walks into the room, where Nelly seems to be about to kiss Nord's foot. Nelly reproaches Nicholas, who bows awkwardly and leaves. When reading "A Robin's House" and other early stories with comical plots of intrigue, in which much is left unexplained, the needle in readers' genre-sensitive meter might oscillate between tragedy suggested by the affective intensity and the presence of death, and comedy suggested by many of the plots. In such context, the descriptions of

characters with peculiar tastes and grand affects are prone to appear in a lighter tone. These stories of pleasantries share the anticlimactic and anticathartic sense of plots that fall through, and the ungroundedness of affects, with the more gloomily toned ones.

In other stories, there is no actual plot to fall through, but the lack of climax is present in a version of morality that is at the same time acute and dissipating. In Carmen La Tosca's breakfast scene in "A Boy Asks a Question" (see Section 3.4.2), the specific indulgences of perfumed talc, fruit and foreign journals[103] are decadent motifs, presented very much like the ones in "The Robin's House." Carmen is extravagant, but a sense of morbidity is absent. The enjoyment of the material world, including one's own body, becomes a *knowledge* of the world, very much like the one Madame von Bartmann seems to possess and wish to deliver to Richter. The boy who lives nearby has come to Carmen with his question, or rather a series of vague and puzzled attempts to discover the point of love and sex and the suffering they cause, because he has the idea that she "know[s] everything": "The postman says you are a 'woman of the world—'" (*CS,* 348). Carmen's answers sound quite sincere and poetic: "Everyone suffers—all of us. [...] men cry too—men *can* hurt" (*CS,* 349). She also addresses the "nothing" and "everything" that recall equally "Aller et Retour" and "Cassation": "when it is all over, you'll listen to nothing at all; only the simple story, told by everything"; "now is the time when you leave everything alone"; "[t]hat is everything. In the end it will be the death of you" (*CS*, 349–350). The sentences are at the same time extremely weighty and quite vague. No final word or gesture of understanding or ease from the part of the boy is delivered; Carmen draws him close to herself, their foreheads meet and she gives her final advice: "[s]tart all over again" (*CS*, 350) The story ends with the narrator reporting that the same afternoon, Carmen and her entourage leave the village.

The discourse of "A Boy Asks a Question" proceeds from material pleasures to an exchange of abstract but pressing ideas that is sealed by haptic contact between two foreheads. Moral outcomes and psychological interpretations are circled around but not touched upon, as in all of the stories discussed. The story has provided its reader with various ingredients and left them to form an assemblage in the fictional world, on Carmen's bed amid scraps of breakfast, newspapers and rumpled laces. In this disarray, suffering and pleasure go hand in hand in a life that, like Madame von Bartmann states in "Aller et retour," has "everything in it: murder, pain, beauty, disease—death" (*CS,* 369). In both stories, innocence meets experience, and the implicit knowledge of a "woman of the world" becomes expressed in her pleasurable relationship to the material world equally as in what she can convey verbally. The linguistic expressions remain so vague as to give priority to the experiential kind of "knowledge." Overall,



103 On decadent references to perfumes and some modernists' complex relationship to them, see Frost 2013, 39–43.

a sense of lightness surrounds both the material enjoyment and the philosophy of life. In "The Robin's House," the levity arises from the comical plot, whereas in "A Boy Asks a Question," it is more from the description of the sensory enjoyment, and the departure of the main character for new adventures at the typical ending for a short story by Barnes. In Barnes's decadent stories, morality and psychological explanations are replaced by non-propositional knowledge and experience, which are sometimes beyond words and come to be synonymous with enjoyment. Enjoyment also brings with it some forms of pain, as in the Barthesian notion of *jouissance* (Barthes 2014). For Barnes, pain is not something concealed behind the enjoyment, but part of the affective whole of the experience, which becomes material for knowledge and affectivity.

The same applies to Rhys: *beside* (not beyond) cynical, somber, and critical tones that can also be appreciated, even in a reader's embodied reaction, there are spaces for the enactment of material pleasures. The two writers' ways to bind pleasures to material objects can be linked to a general modernist interest in the material world and even tendencies of "dehumanization" of art, a vision of art removed from narrative features of human interest. José Ortega y Gasset writes:

> [The new style] tends toward the dehumanization of art; to an avoidance of living forms; to ensuring that a work of art should be nothing but a work of art; to considering art simply as play and nothing else; to an essential irony; to an avoidance of all falsehood; and finally, toward an art which makes no spiritual or transcendental claims whatsoever. (Ortega y Gasset 1968, 70)

A preference for play and irony and the absence of "spiritual or transcendental claims" is as characteristics of the fiction of Barnes and Rhys. However, Ortega y Gasset demands clarity and rationality, not leaving much room for affectivity. Affective qualities are prominent in Rhys's and Barnes's stories alike, although even they become slightly "dehumanized." Tim Armstrong (2005, 94) points out a modernist tendency of depicting sensations as "distributed" rather than "owned," while David Herman (2011a) suggests that experience in modernist texts spreads beyond the confines of the individual. Barnes's prose definitely moves in the direction of distributed cognition, occasionally taking it even further into the direction of questioning human subjectivity.

The stories discussed in this chapter invite affective involvement with all kinds of material things, including "superficial" or "frivolous" things and thing-like characters presented to the reader in varying

tableaux and assemblages. The things are present to the senses and thus involve the reader as an embodied being in their affective experientiality, even when characters' minds remain unreadable and there is a difficulty in naming specific emotions; when characters are portrayed as things rather than lived human bodies. The nonhuman things, as well as the thing-like characters encountered in the stories are expressive of feeling even when they seem to lack inner life, and thus create interaffective and empathic bonds beyond those we are accustomed to look for in studying fiction. Different forms of happiness and pleasure are especially frequent to stem from these things, and attention to them brings forth hitherto undiscovered reserves of affirmative affectivity that exists beside, not on top of or underneath the critical, ironical, cynical and tragic tones that also frequent the texts. The affectivity in Rhys and Barnes is complex and ambiguous, and located in the shared, lived world of lived bodies, instead of inner psyches, which is a new reading of the way modernist fiction involves its readers.

# Making Sense of Things

# 5 Making Sense of Things

Djuna Barnes's and Jean Rhys's stories invite readerly sense-making on many levels, as has become clear from the analyses in the preceding chapters. Their evocations of things and materialities resonate with our basic sensorimotor experiences and our sociocultural knowledge; they invite affective immersion as well as symbolic interpretation and a critical consciousness. These levels tend to be intermingled: critical, reflective considerations are built on and modified by embodied, pre-reflective affectivity. The basis of this discussion of inter-level sense-making was laid in the analyses of the meanings of spaces, domesticity, and movement in Chapter 2. This final analysis chapter takes meaning and sense-making as its main foci.

The previous analyses in this study have shown that the stories' tendency to highlight similarities between things and people has embodied, affective and aesthetical grounds, as well as ethical implications. In this chapter, the tendency is inspected further in Jean Rhys's short fiction. Djuna Barnes, on the other hand, favors abundant descriptions, whose implications for agency and affectivity have been explored in the previous chapters. These, too, can be read in multiple ways, and sometimes they purposefully lead their reader astray: symbolic or allegorical interpretations of things, as well as psychological attributions of mind and emotion to the humans in these assemblages, are ironically thwarted. In terms of sense-making, the properties of symbolic and allegorical readings in relation to materiality and embodiment, as well as their alternatives, need to be explored and spelled out: what kind of reading would best do justice to the texts? Consequently, the aim is not to answer the question "what do the things in these stories mean," but rather, "how do they mean?"

The aim is to shed light on how meaning is made with the help of an "embodied mode of attentiveness that involves us in acts of sensing, perceiving, feeling, registering and engaging," as Rita Felski suggests we ought to see reading (Ibid., 176). The analyses examine how the evocations of things and materialities and their experientiality invite readers to engage in such acts. In their manifesto of "surface reading," an approach resonating with the attention taken here to things and materialities, Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus suggest paying attention to the materiality of the text under scrutiny (referring both to its language and to the "material" makings of the reading mind). They suggest pursuing a descriptive attitude, with "no need to translate the text into a theoretical or historical metalanguage in order to make the text meaningful" (Best & Marcus 2009, 9–11). Methodologically, translation into any

metalanguage is not the aim here, either; however, I consider the evocation of cultural and historical contexts important for the discussion of how the short stories make meanings with things. Djuna Barnes's abundant descriptions draw on *fin-de-siècle* decadence and Roman Catholic iconography, while Rhys's allusions to the domains of photography, impressionistic art and contemporary discussions of mass culture are of importance for the interpretation of her texts.

Thus, the focus of this chapter is on the production of meaning *for* someone, in which case the definition of 'meaning' is colored by embodied experientiality, even in the case of culturally sensitive and symbolic meanings. Mark Johnson importantly suggests that we see higher-order meaning-making "as growing out of and shaped by our abilities to perceive things, manipulate objects, move our bodies in space, and evaluate our situation" (Johnson M. 2008, 11). Building on conceptual metaphor theory as well as John Dewey's "continuity principle" between "lower" and "higher" forms of mental activity (Dewey 1991, 28–31), Johnson claims that our sensorimotor being-in-the-world sets the basis for higher capacities of meaning-making, like the ones present in literary reading. Additionally, material things, even ones evoked in fiction often come with "tacit meanings" based on the kind of use and interaction they have habitually afforded us (Määttänen 2015, 89). The division of cognitive activities and capacities into "higher" and "lower" is not without problems, but the main principle here is important for the arguments of this study, and itself not entirely dependent on these hierarchical classifications. The basic affective engagement with materialities as expressive and meaningful in Barnes' and Rhys's texts, as it was studied in the previous chapters, is not to be seen as a separate phenomenon from conscious or intellectual activities to do with of interpretation and understanding, but a basis on which the latter are built, or something that permeates it, if we want to avoid a spatially hierarchical metaphor.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), our higher-order, metaphorical capacities of making sense of the world rest on the experience our body and the lived world of things afford in their interaction: we conceptualize the world though metaphors of directions (the future is forward, the past is behind), containers (the mind is a vessel with content) and things as individuals and groups, based on our sensorimotor interaction with such phenomena. This approach, with its updated forms, remains current within cognitive linguistics and psychology as well as some of their applications to literary studies (see Evans & Green 2006, Fauconnier & Turner 2002, Caracciolo 2012, 2014b). When looking at the phenomenon of literature, meaning is of course made by means of language. However, it is not an intrinsic property of language or words, but, like experientiality, a relational

phenomenon brought forth jointly by the text and its reader (cf. Caracciolo 2014b). As Terence Cave has pointed out, seeing our relationship to language as grounded on our bodily being-in-the-world gives reason to view language itself as a set of affordances that restrict our thinking but also enable different courses for it. Importantly, language viewed this way does not ontologically precede and determine our thinking, as has been suggested in postmodern, poststructuralist approaches (Cave 2016, 54). For Gilles Deleuze "sense" emerges as an effect or an event that is neither a property of linguistic or logical propositions nor a property of "things," but enabled by both (Deleuze 1989, 19–20, 70, 95). Applied to the task of this study, we cannot find "sense" in the things of Rhys and Barnes's stories, in the words used to evoke those things, nor exclusively as propositional content in the mind of the reader who encounters these words/things and at complete liberty to interpret them; sense happens in this encounter of "surfaces."

'Sense' is a valuable notion for this study because of of its evocation of the domain of *the senses* as well as the more reflective, conceptually organized parts of interpretation that in everyday use fall under its scope.[104] Meaning and sense are still used here interchangeably, while 'sense-making' refers to a specific activity that produces meaning, as defined by enactivist cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind. Ezequiel Di Paolo's recent definition demonstrates how a discussion of meaning (here significance) is enhanced by attention to sense-making as activity, and how sense-making may involve both primordial, pre-reflective processes and higher-order ones:

> To make sense is for a body to encounter value and significance in the world [...]. Sense-making is not something that happens in the body, or in the brain, but it always implies a relational and value-laden coherence between body and world—the world does not present itself as sense-data to be interpreted, but is itself a participant in the sense-making process and often the stage where my sense-making is enacted [...]. Sense-making is not primarily a high-level voluntary interpretation of the world (though it can take this form) but bodily and worldly activities of all sorts, from biological and pre-reflective to conscious and linguistic. In all these cases, sense-making is always affective. (Di Paolo 2014, xii)

This definition asserts that sense-making can take the form of conscious, conceptual ("high-level") interpretation, but it also encompasses biological and pre-reflective engagement with the world, and that affectivity colors the activity throughout these "levels" (see also

104 In some basic definitions of enactivism, drawing from the Buddhist tradition, the connection between senses and sense is also explored as the mind is suggested to function like one of the senses, with thoughts as its "object" (Varela, Thomson & Rosch 1991, 64).

Colombetti 2013). In this chapter, different types of meaning and sense-making are discussed in relation to the literary works, but with the overarching idea that they share a common basis in an embodied, affective activity like the one described by Di Paolo; activity in a material world with material things. As stated by Johnson, meanings do not "pop up" out of nowhere; they "must be grounded in our bodily connections with things" (Johnson M. 2008, 25). Our *feelings* of the qualitative dimensions of this world develop and acquire meaning, yet these are not experiences of an isolated subjective nature, but qualities "in the world as much as they are in us" (Ibid.). We also experience qualities of the material world as colored by culturally shared meanings (Johnson 1987, 14). Therefore, even if we approach meaning as always being *for* someone, it is not to suggest solipsistic or subjectivist account.

The first sections discuss Jean Rhys's work, this time exclusively the stories published in the collection *The Left Bank,* to examine how sense and meaning are made on the level of individual stories as well as the entire collection. Drawing especially on Johnson's notion of embodied meaning, I examine how the materiality of both things and people and Rhys's ways of presenting them as uniform masses or as aesthetic detail affect readerly sense-making from the basic, embodied and affective levels to aesthetic and ethical considerations. In fact, if we follow Dewey's and later Johnson's thinking, aesthetic experience is not a "higher" faculty per se, but a condensed form of basic sense-making experiences (Johnson M. 2008, xi; Dewey 1934). In Section 5.2, the focus is on Djuna Barnes's short stories and their use of description and material detail. Allegorical interpretation is compared and combined with an "archaeological" one, tracing historical and cultural connections of material things, before these, too are read in the light of theories of embodied sense-making, meaning, and metaphor. Both sections end with a discussion of the narrating and focalizing structures of the short stories, suggesting how these devices combined with the materialities of meaning work to create aesthetic experience, and how they contribute to what is alluring and affective in the stories and collections.

# 5.1 Meaning with the Masses: Sense-making, Aesthetics, and Ethics in The Left Bank

In the previous chapter, we have seen how Rhys's stories build communities around things, and invite our affective engagement in the form of empathy for things and people-as-things. I have suggested a reading that both reveals the ironical mode and the critical social commentary and acknowledges the affective aspects of texts that involve moments of happiness and belonging that the reader is invited to enact. What all preceding analyses have shown is that Rhys's fiction does not comply with a system of thought that divides the world neatly into subjects and objects. The environment and its "objects" such as clothes, rooms and parks are sometimes provided with speech and an imagined liveliness, and they gain the status of agents in conjunction with human characters by way of magical thinking as well as the "interobjectivity" of the social practices they are involved in. On the other hand, human characters (particularly, but not exclusively women), are "thingified" by the style and voice of the narration in texts such as "Mannequin" and "Vienne." However, even these characters are paradoxically presented as subjects of feeling and participants in action. As Mark Johnson (2007, 20) puts it, "subjects and objects [...] are abstractions from the interactive process of our experience of a meaningful self-in-a-world." The world presents itself to us as subjects and objects, yet these are not ontological, "objective" categories, but abstractions made in interactive, culturally colored sense-making, and therefore also imprecise and malleable. The following analyses discuss the ways in which Rhys's characters and narrators in *The Left Bank* make sense of their surroundings, with varying degrees of subjecthood and objecthood, and how they in turn invite the reader to see the meanings involved, creating three levels of interpretation: the basic embodied sense-making, the aesthetic consciousness of a reader of fiction, and the reflective appraisal of ethical questions.

In his preface to *The Left Bank*, Ford Madox Ford taunts Rhys (in an ultimately laudatory manner) on erasing even the few "words of descriptive matter as had crept into her work," for the benefit of "passion, hardship, emotions" (Ford 1984, 26). It is true that Rhys's

stories are not filled with such rich descriptive passages as we are about to examine in the work of Djuna Barnes; yet her equalizing, aestheticizing approach to both people and things, and the tendencies toward journalistic observation, seem to arise from a writerly ethos that is predominantly descriptive. This leads to the stories' portrayal of their human characters as types and masses of people. The notion of 'the masses' was present in many discussions about phenomena of modernity contemporary to Rhys, from commercialism and entertainment to factory work and fascism.[105] In the following, masses of people lead to masses of things and to the discussion of how both things and people are picked out of these groupings for aesthetic effect and ethical consideration. The final part focuses on the narrating voice that persists throughout the entire collection. I analyze its part in construing a textual style dominated by things and masses as well as its effect on the sense-making invited by the aesthetic whole of the work and the ethical considerations invited by it. The connections between experientiality, ethics, and aesthetics in Rhys's work have not yet been thoroughly discussed; nor has an analysis of *The Left Bank* as a textual whole has not been undertaken. By focusing especially on *The Left Bank,* the discussion investigates how the format of a collection of short fiction, made up of stories, anecdotes and sketches loosely bound by shared themes, temporality, geography, and repertoire of things, affects readerly possibilities of sense-making.

### 5.1.1. Sprinklings and Masses of People

Jean Rhys portrays people as representative of a type, or part of a mass. The tendency of early researchers to read her protagonists as *representatives* of a type has been rightly criticized for its narrowness and reductionism as well as victimizing tendencies, a usual type being "the underdog" classified as such already in Ford's introduction to *The Left Bank* (Emery 2012, xi; Le Gallez 1990, 1–8; cf. Ford 1984). However, I maintain that typification as an aesthetic device is such an important part of Rhys's writing that it needs to be studied here, and its relations to habitual ways of thinking through metaphorical things and masses pointed out. Only the scope needs to be broadened from the main protagonists, easily seen as representatives of the authorial outlook, to other characters and elements, and the orientation kept closer to the "surface" of

105 In Siegfried Kracauer's essay collection, *The Mass Ornament,* whose publication in 1927 coincided with the publication of *The Left Bank,* and Adorno and Horkheimer's later "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (1944).

the text, regarding the textual devices used to produce the impression of types and masses. Typification is looked at as a textual strategy with cognitive grounds and effects, instead of assuming a representative relation of the fictional type to one actually existing, while recognizing also the historical and cultural context of these textual choices.

Let us reconsider the models' lunch hour in the story "Mannequin." The young women come across as a uniform mass in that they are all dressed in identical black cotton chemises designed for their off-duty time; in addition, each of them is acting according to her "type," on the basis of which clothes are selected for the models to present in the shop. Similarly, Rhys's writing classifies and typifies chorus-girls, café-going artists and tourists, different nationalities as well as men and women. Specific subclasses such as the "*anglaise*" (an Engliswoman in Paris), or the "*cerebrale*" (an intelligent woman, portrayed as a hybrid monster in *Good Morning, Midnight*) also emerge, always with a heavy dose of irony. These types reflect the close ties of Rhys's life and writing with the fashions and issues of the day and media such as fashion magazines, as pointed out by Sophie Oliver (2016).

In addition to its resemblance to surrealist photography and installations, as shown in Section 3.1.1, the stance of Rhys's stories toward their characters and things can be compared to early 20th century "humanist" photography by artists such as Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004) and Brassaï (1899–1984).[106] These photographers continued the documentarily oriented portrayal of workers, dancers, prostitutes, café clients and other urban (or more specifically Parisian) types, undertaken in the previous century by painters such as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901). In their pictures, there is a curious mixture of, on the one hand, the celebration of individuals and forms of life that are at the bottom or margins of social hierarchies, and on the other, a tendency to position the "subjects" of the pictures as specimens of a recognizable type; something that can be seen as *dehumanizing* rather than "humanist."

A similar tension haunts Rhys's writing, and it takes a visual form. In addition to the intertextual connection to impressionistic painting and humanist photography, we can look at Rhys's writing in the framework of bodily metaphors and conceptual blending, in which the experience of one sense, or here one art form, is used to conceptualize that of another (see Section 2.1; Lakoff & Turner 2002; Lakoff & Johnson 2003, 3). At the very end of "Mannequin," following the description of Anna's newly found sense of happiness and belonging, it is as if the scope of the narrative "lens" was widened to encompass first her colleagues from the shop, then the whole street with other similar shops, to form an image of the streets near Place Vendôme that could be an iconic shot by one of the humanist photographers:[107]

106 Brassaï's photographs of Paris are used to illustrate Rhys's *Complete Novels* published by W. W. Norton (1985).

107 Literary *fiction* allows for imagining this picture in color instead of black and white, which was still used by photographers at that point.

> Georgette passed her and smiled; Babette was in
> a fur coat. All up the street the mannequins were
> coming out of the shops, pausing on the pavements
> a moment, making them as gay and as beautiful
> as beds of flowers before they walked swiftly away
> and the Paris night swallowed them up. (*LB*, 70)

The ending repeats the flower metaphor that Anna, the focalizer of the story, has already used for the models in the dingy dressing-room ("an inadequate conservatory for these human flowers," *LB*, 6). Georgette and Babette are named and singled out as individuals, Georgette even as a smiling agent, while Babette begins to disappear within her fur coat. The rest of the passage shows mannequins *en masse*, forming a delightful spectacle of beauty and gaiety on the streets. In the earlier chapters, we have already begun to see how such "thingified" presentations of human beings as bodies and as surfaces need not immediately equal representations of alienation and objectification, although these discourses are never far from Rhys's writing. What is the mechanism of sense-making invited by a story that buries the human subject in a fur coat or presents her as a flower, a decorative element?

If we take a step back and look at "Mannequin" in the context of the whole collection of stories, we begin to see a variety of "human flowers" scattered all through the work. *The Left Bank* is constructed as a collection of both longer, "linearly" proceeding stories and shorter, "spatial" or "anecdotal" (Harrington 2007, 5; Frank 1991) glimpses into moments of life on the Paris Left Bank, with detours to the south of France, other European cities, and the Caribbean Antilles. Despite changing narrators, sometimes intradiegetic, named characters, sometimes extradiegetic third-person narrators, the way situations and human beings are perceived and commented on remains rather constant, which creates a sense of continuity in the narrating voice throughout the collection. The same is true of the focalizers, who do not always coincide with the narrators.[108] The way the stories invite their readers to make sense of them is strongly guided by the way their focalizers are shown to be making sense of their surroundings; a focalizer, after all, usually invites the reader to share her point of view more strongly than other characters (Caracciolo 2014b, 173). For referring to this guiding voice present throughout the collection I use the concept of "mind style" coined by Roger Fowler. It denotes "an *impression* of a world-view," the means that the text uses to convey a certain point of view and conception

108 These *distinctions* are explored further in Section 5.1.3.

of the fictional world as taken by a character in that world.[109] This is a concept more related to a "mind-set" or a world view than, for instance, the notion of 'voice' as applied by Genette (Fowler 1977, 76, emphasis mine; Herman 2011b). However, before investigating the overall combination of mind styles in *The Left Bank*, we begin with a single story with a single narrator and focalizer, useful for its ample examples of characterization and typification.

The final and longest story in the collection, "Vienne," is divided into eleven titled sections.[110] As discussed briefly in Section 4.1, it is a narrative of a young couple, Frances and Pierre, staying in Vienna and leading a conspicuously affluent life, before fleeing from debtors and authorities through different European countries and cities. The events, narrated and focalized by Frances, take place during or just after the First World War. However, the war is only marginally present in the story. Most of "Vienne" consists of a cavalcade of people encountered during the few years depicted. The titles of the sections emphasize this impression, especially ones closer to the beginning of the story: "André Parisien," "Tillie," "Fischl: Winter 1920–Spring 1921," "Dancing at Eisenstein's with Antoine Renault." In the whole story, both people and things become tokens that help to keep track of time and place, but these subsections tend toward character study using typification.

André is a "little man," who takes pains to disguise his height with the cut of his suits. This comic characterization is accompanied by what is hinted at already in his epithet in the subtitle, "Parisien." In Frances's, and Rhys's, system of types, being Parisian not only means coming from Paris: "One could tell a Frenchman, Parisian, a mile off. Quantities of hair which he had waved every week, rather honest blue eyes, a satyr's nose and mouth" (*LB*, 195). The image of the satyr that is used to brand André's physiognomy also introduces his most central characteristic, namely a ceaseless interest in women (usually dancers) and a habit for games of seduction that are usually realized as simple plots of chase, conquest, and abandon. In the beginning, André dominates the games, but in the fourth section he gets conned (a classic plot that involves supposedly missing pearls that he has to recompense for) and eventually abandoned by another typified character, Tillie. She is described in a passage characteristic of Frances's narration as "the most complete specimen of the adventuress, the Man Eater, I've ever met" (*LB*, 200). Tillie is shown in contrast to Ridi, Andrés previous "friend," a "shy" girl who gets mistreated by him. "Glory to the Tillies, the avengers of the Ridis!" (*LB*, 208) Frances exclaims, pushing both Tillie and Ridi further into the realm of

109 I use the concept emphasizing the "style" component as a reference to textual devices; according to Elena Semino (2007, *169*), it is unclear whether the main reference of the concept is to this level, or to the level of the attribution of consciousness to fictional minds by interpreting the text (if a clear difference between the two can even be made).

110 That is, in its complete *version* included in *The Left Bank*. The story was shortened, and its subtitles removed for republication in *Tigers Are Better-looking* (1968).

specimens, names that in the plural define their own type instead of pointing to an individual, like "The Parisien." They have their places in a system that is built on the moral mind-set constructed around Frances, expressed by her mind style that favors neat and definitive characterizations and a cynical approach to sexual relations, as well as socioeconomic ones, as a game of eat-or-be-eaten. Most focalizers of the collection can be said to share a similar mind style. None of the characters comes across as bad or deplorable, nor as virtuous, but they both are portrayed by Frances's narrating voice as victims of the way of the world. The section "Tillie" ends with Andrés hope for reconciliation as imagined by Frances: "The next girl perhaps—will be sweet and gentle. His turn to be eater. / Detestable world" (Ibid.).

Many of the characters in "Vienne" are defined by nationality-related stereotypes. Fischl, a casual acquaintance with whom Frances plays golf, is characterized as "An Important Person," and "like most Viennese, charming, and clever as hell" (*LB*, 217). Eisenstein, on the other hand, is described, this time in a newspaper article read by Frances, as "the typical Viennese aristocrat" (*LB*, 218): he has lost his fortune because of the war and become a dancing instructor to make ends meet. These characterizations sweep through the whole story, to the point of nagging repetition: "all Vienna was vulgar" (*LB*, 201); "Excessively good-looking, but, being a Prussian, brutal, of course" (*LB*, 203); "the Japanese thought a lot of the German army and the German way of keeping women in their place" (*LB*, 211); "the Viennese have nearly as much temperament as the French, the Hungarians even more" (*LB*, 213); "the attractive Englishman is a little bit stupid, a little bit 'thick', more than a little bit an egoist, and a hypocrite" (*LB*, 219).[111] All in all, the classifying stance that the narrator/focalizer (many of the characterizations are attributed to Frances in free indirect discourse) takes toward people contributes to their appearing in the story as a large mass of people under the mercy of power structures and habits, divided into smaller masses with their typical representatives.

This mind style, combined with the ironic tone, can be seen to reflect alienation and cynicism brought about in Frances by travel and a life based on spending her husband's money of dubious origin, what Judith Kegan Gardiner has called her moral downfall (Gardiner 1989, 29). However, if we look at a more basic level of sense-making that the text invites, and the context of the whole collection, these small and large masses come across as a continual way of tapping into very basic, embodied experience in readers, and producing a certain

111 There is also a group of Japanese expatriates who refer to Viennese women as "war material" (*LB,* 209), set as a disturbing parallel to Frances's point of view.

aesthetic outcome. I suggest that the reasons for such strategies of characterization are not merely related to the "moral" of the story exemplified by Frances as a "fallen woman."

A group or a mass that consists of individual things is one of the basic patterns created by experiences of bodily interaction with the world, what Johnson (1987) has called 'image schemas' (Johnson M. 2008, 81–82).[112] These schemas are used in the arts to appeal to the reader's experiential background (Johnson M. 2008, 209; Caracciolo 2012, 97–98). In "Vienne," this would involve the schema of things grouped together on the basis of a characteristic. It can appear in a vaguely visual form, but also invite the imaginary hapticity involved in the perception of forms and groups. Human bodies afford the possibility of social interaction (see Froese & Di Paolo 2011, 21–25; Gibson 1979, 135–136), but they, too, can be seen as bodies in space grouped in various formations. As James Gibson puts it, other animate beings appear to us as "animate objects," with their own affordances: they are "detached objects with topologically closed surfaces, but they change the shape of their surfaces while yet retaining the same fundamental shape." (Gibson 1979, 135–136). The way the story insists on its narrator grouping human "animate objects" into sets with one defining property (German and French, shy dancers and ruined aristocrats, Tillies and Ridis) solidifies the presence of the schema in the flow of reading, whereby it can dominate the reading as an underlying basic experience. The groups of people are considered as exemplary of a certain narrator's mind set and world view and thereby serve to characterize her experiential point of view constructed in the narrative.

This, of course, is not the only thing a reader of the story is made aware of. When engaged in reflective interpretation, a reader can proportion these experiences conveyed by the narrator's mind style with a historical context feeding gendered and ethnic stereotypes, and read the whole as part of Rhys's critical commentary of the "detestable world." However, if we stop to consider the stories as aesthetic arrangements that invite visual and multisensory imagining, it becomes clear that humans and things play similar parts in the worldmaking of the narrative, tapping into the way human minds are capable of and often restricted to experiencing people as masses and groups. In the moment of reading, the schematic arrangement of elements into groups is encountered within the frame of fictionality defined by the fact that the reader is, indeed, reading a short story. As Merja Polvinen (2017, 143; 2016, 29) suggests, the whole discourse and communicative status of a work of fiction becomes enacted imaginatively by the reader, in addition to the world and character experiences represented by it. The discursive strategies and the situation in which the reader is participating when engaging with the story are

112 This is a slightly misleading title for an otherwise useful concept, since these schemas do not (and Johnson does not claim they would) pertain exclusively to the sense of vision, and should not be conceived as "pictures in the head" with representational content (cf. Johnson 1987, 45).

likely to be recognized as part of a fictional, artistic whole. Thereby the perception of the aesthetic and rhetorical value of Frances's stereotypical comments gains attention beside their ethical implications, which would be pre-eminent if Frances's words were uttered by an actual person in the real world.

*The Left Bank* calls forth various schemas that rely on the embodied being-in-the-world, but the tendency of grouping becomes highlighted in the context of the whole collection. Partly this is due to typification, as in "Vienne," partly to other strategies such as the photographic description encountered in the final scene of "Mannequin." When the collection is read as a whole, these repeating narrative devices form part of the communicative framing of the narrative. The scene in "Mannequin" is aesthetically unified in its presentation of the human flowers that beautify the streets and its borrowing from the visual arts. The stereotypes in "Vienne," on the other hand, have no common aesthetic characteristics, but the very repetition of the gestures of grouping throughout the collection is likely to feed back into the aesthetic experience of this story, too: it is not only recognized by the reader, but lived through enactively as part of the repertoire of fictional devices that make up the experience of reading *The Left Bank*. The collection invites enactive participation on many levels. The stories solicit basic bodily image schemas, along with socioculturally shared schematic features readers can draw on; the repeated evocation of such schemas becomes a stylistic device contributing to the aesthetic effect of the stories and part of the enactive experience of readers schooled by reading fiction. Reflective considerations of the stories' ethical implications are invited by interpretive connections that can be made between the mind styles of the narrators and the historical context of the stories, and these interpretations arise beside and are colored by the basic schematic experiences and the recognition of the fictionality of what is being read. On the other hand, we need to remember that the image-schematic experiences, too, are partly culture-dependent, and the experience of reading affects the reader's experiential background on all levels: they make a feedback loop of reflective and pre-reflective sense-making (see Caracciolo 2014b, 49–50).

Human bodies can also be presented as decorative elements that create the ambience of a story. In the impressionistic description of a prison visiting hour in "From a French Prison", people are compared to spiders:

> From the foot of the staircase leading down from the room in which they waited, ran a very long whitewashed corridor, incredibly grim, and dark in spite of the whitewash. Here and there a warder sat close against the wall looking in its shadow like a huge spider—a bloated, hairy insect born of the darkness and of the dank smell. (*LB*, 44)

In "The Grey Day," on the other hand, a depressed poet, one of the few male focalizers in the collection, sees nothing inspiring or beautiful around him: "Then his despair faded again to greyness in that dark, quiet café, where two men with hooked noses and greasy, curly hair, played draughts" (*LB*, 142). The human elements in these two descriptions appeal to our ready ability to imagine a human figure, but at the same time these figures are shown blending into and "born of" their environment. They act as parts of the environment to create the ambience of the scene, with which the focalizers are then shown to interact in the formulation of their mind-states. In the prison scene, the narrator as the perceiver and experiencer of the scene retains his/her humanness, but the anonymous warders, "here and there," emerge not only as animals but parts of the scenery, created by its darkness and humidity. In the café, the two men act as furnishings that heighten the "greyness" of the environment.

The description in these two stories recalls realist use of environmental detail as a support for characterization (Stanica 2014, 514); on the other hand, they can equally well be seen as exemplary of the modernist vision of the interconnectedness of the experiencing being and its environment (Herman 2011a). Rhys seems to blend these two aesthetic aims: she combines a realist observation and classification with a modernist focus on experience that extends into the world. In the prison story, the narrator-focalizer is not identified as a character in the story but rather acts as an "empty deictic center" (Fludernik 1996, 273). Experientiality is still present in the voice that recounts the surroundings and creates a virtual presence of a proxy-experiencer for the reader (Ibid., Caracciolo 2014b, 169). This would be likely to happen in realist fiction, too.

In "The Grey Day," the environment is there not only to reflect the moods of the focalizer: it is also shown to participate in their emergence. In the dark, quiet café, decorated with the "greasy" men, his mood "fades" from a slightly agitated state of despair, which could be better expressed by sharp forms and warm colors than greyness. The color grey is a metaphorical expression of a vaguely depressed mood in line with the environment; the title of the story may equally well denote weather and a mind-state.[113] The environment, in this sense,

113 The color gray seems to be a repeating motif in Rhys's life and work. Rhys used Gray as her last name, with changing first names, when she performed as a chorus girl, and named the protagonist of her first, unpublished novel, *Triple Sec,* Suzy Gray. Sue Thomas (2015, 27) also points out the intertextual connections of Rhys's work to Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*.

does not mean all that is left outside the human: it is composed of both nonhuman and human elements. In many of the stories in *The Left Bank*, the exploration of an individual consciousness, even as spread out in the world, actually does not seem to be of most importance. Here the journalism-like, descriptive tendencies of realism are a closer comparison. The journalistic ethos of the collection is intensified by its paratexts (the title and preface) that direct its readers to approach it as a documentary, although impressionistic account of contemporary Parisian (expatriate) life centered on the *Rive Gauche*, of which "Miss Rhys" has "profound knowledge" (Ford 1984, 23).

Similarly, set in the context of the whole work, moments of psycho-narration and other references to individual consciousness become parts of its descriptive ethos. The poet of "The Grey Day" unsuccessfully tries to conjure up inspiration and faith with the help of his imagination:

> He shut his eyes and tried hard to think of blue seas in the sunshine, of the white, supple arms of a dancer dressed in red—of the throb that lives in a violin and the movement of flowers in the wind.
>
> It was quite useless.
>
> Besides, flowers have stupid faces and so have dancers for the matter of that. (*LB*, 142)

Almost all the "happy objects" (see Section 4.1.1, Ahmed 2010) that the poet imagines also appear in one or several other stories in the collection. We have encountered blue seas and sunshine as affective things in the stories set in the Caribbean and the French Riviera. Dancers are present regularly, especially in "Vienne," and flowers are not only given as gifts ("A Night," "Learning to Be a Mother"), but also presented as metaphorical stand-ins for human characters, as in "Mannequin." At the end of the passage from "The Grey Day," in free direct discourse, flowers are compared with dancers and given "stupid faces," in a gesture of personification, a phenomenon that is inspected more closely in the following section. Thus, a reference to the other stories of the collection lends some color to the otherwise "grey" passage, but offers the colors as "useless" and illusory and grey as the tone of reality.

The stories in *The Left Bank* are *sprinkled* with human "animate objects" and nonhuman lively things, to use another metaphorical expression derived from the world of things. One of the stories, "Tout Montparnasse and a Lady," actually features sprinkling as a means of expression, combined with a list of nationalities and origins characteristic of the collection. The fictional space observed in this story is

the *Bal Musette,* which refers to an actual, famous Montparnasse café with an international clientele. It is defined as follows: "It is Chelsea, London, with a large dash of Greenwich Village, New York, to liven it, and a slight sprinkling of Moscow, Christiania and even of Paris to give incongruous local colourings" (*LB*, 54). The metaphorical expressions of "dash" and "sprinkle" parallel the café space and its visitors with the cocktail served there and their ingredients. This contextually fitting metaphor binds together the embodied-conceptual, aesthetical and historically conscious levels of reading: cocktails evoke a basic sense experience of a mixture of tastes and colors that can solicit an enactive response based on reader-specific experiential traces; they are intratextually linked with the aesthetics of groups and combinations evoked in multisensory images throughout the collection; and they are likely to have been a fashionable drink of choice among the cosmopolitan clients of a Left Bank café in the 1920s. It may fit a certain selection of images a reader is already able to associate with this scene on the basis of her cultural and historical knowledge.

*The Left Bank* invites readers to imagine people in masses, defined by gender and origin and "dashed" or "sprinkled" over the map of Paris, Europe and beyond. In "Vienne," the same effect is accomplished within one story. This textual strategy can be read as a defamiliarizing repetition-with-a-difference of gendered and ethicized stereotypes, ironically presented by the implied author who seems to almost but not quite share the mind style of the character-narrator; this issue is addressed in Section 5.1.3. The repetition of such topoi throughout Rhys's work creates a sense of what Johnson and Moran (2015, 2) call "estranged familiarity," which is also thematized in her stories in the form of memories and spatial experiences (see Chapter 2). However, the interpretation of the repetitive strategy of grouping as such is built on ambiguous meanings lent to the people-as-things by the stylistic and aesthetic choices borrowing from imagery contemporary to the story, and the evocations of basic bodily, cross-sensory schemas. If we follow the pragmatist idea that things acquire tacit meanings as a result of habit, and the embodied cognitive approach to readerly sense-making as an interaction between the discourse of the text and the reader's experiential background, we can suggest that Rhys's repetition of a certain embodied schema (a mass of things) in connection with a certain object (people) can create new "affordances" in the reader's repertoire (see Määttänen 2015, 91; Gibson 1979). For instance, in "Tout Montparnasse and a Lady" and "Mannequin," the aesthetic gesture of sprinkling objectified and typified human bodies on the scene of the story likens the humans to decorative elements or cocktail ingredients. They are masses of thing-like *objects*, colored, delicious entities promising joy; they are vivid not in spite of but because of this objecthood.

The ambiguity of Rhys's masses raises ethical questions. As noted earlier, the tacit meanings and affordances are also evaluative, and form an affective basis for ethical considerations. They can lead readers to ponder interpretively whether the values the text invites

them to share are sound ones, to be taken ironically or to be contradicted (cf. Määttänen 2015, 96). All this can occur simultaneously with the enactive engagement with them. As Gibson (1979, 140) suggests,

> The perceiving of an affordance is not a process of perceiving a value-free physical object to which meaning is somehow added in a way that no one has been able to agree upon; it is a process of perceiving a value-rich ecological object. Any substance, any surface, any layout has some affordance for benefit or injury to someone. (Gibson 1979, 140)

All literature solicits such movement between levels of sense-making; what makes Rhys's massified people noteworthy is the texts' blend of ironical commentary, aesthetic experience and tacit, affective resonances produced by a mixture of human and nonhuman bodies. In the following, the ambiguities of personifying things and thingifying people are investigated from this perspective.

### 5.1.2. "Vividnesses": Lively Things and Thing-like People

In many of the anecdotal pieces of *The Left Bank*, there is no one character *or* thing that would be singled out and investigated with closer interest. The narration of these stories travels around and focuses on several participants present in a given situation and a given space. "In a Café," one of the briefest sketches, has an external focalizer, and consists of the documentary description of a scene: another Paris café in the evening, with a five-person band playing. The customers are characterized as "stout business men" drinking beer, "neat women in neat hats," "temperamental gentlemen in shabby hats" drinking *fines à l'eau*, and "temperamental ladies" wearing turbans and drinking mint liquor, all enveloped in a "peaceful atmosphere" (*LB*, 50). The peace is disturbed by a visiting singer, who performs the song "*Les grues de Paris*" that tells the tragic story of a prostitute. This seems to cause some agitation among the clientele, continuing when the singer proceeds to sell records of the song. An American lady buys two, the usual orchestra starts playing once more without the singer, and "peace descend[s] again on the café" (*LB*, 52).

The main "event" of the story thus is a change in the general ambience, and its protagonists consist of the general group sitting in the

café; a protagonist given *en masse.* The narrator of this story, too, takes a typifying and distanced stance toward the mass protagonist, which likens the mass to the *grue*:

> The grues are the sellers of illusion of Paris, the frail and sometimes pretty ladies, and Paris is sentimental and indulgent toward them. That, in the mass and theoretically of course, not always practically or to individuals. (*LB*, 51)

The *grues* "in the mass" sometimes give rise to sentimental attitudes, but the agent these attitudes are attributed to is also massified by the synecdochical expression "Paris is sentimental." In the context of the story, both expressions contribute to the logic of the mass: the narrative repeats the attitude pictured in the quotation toward the *grues* in its description of the people in the café. This can be used as an example of Rhys's sympathy for the underdog, this time the fictional prostitute. Her story in the form of a song, a nonhuman agent, agitates the respectable crowd ("it was respectably full that evening", *LB*, 49), and is positioned as more similar to than different from them. Paradoxically, but typically of Rhys's writing, the thingifying gesture of the narrator toward human beings also affords a sympathetic reading.

However, it is noteworthy that the peaceful and stagnant ambience of the café ("an atmosphere of a place that always had been and always would be," *LB*, 50), and thereby of the story, is slightly stirred in the description even before the appearance of the singer and his song:

> The only vividnesses in the café, the only spots of unrest, were the pictures exposed for sale, and the rows of liqueur bottles in tiers above the counter of the bar, traditional bottles of bright colours and disturbingly graceful shapes. (*LB*, 50)

In the storyworld, art induces unrest, which might be a hint that this is also the desired effect of the story. In the passage above, even ordinary things in the form of "traditional" bottles above the café counter are accepted into the realm of "graceful" and "disturbing" things or events. Moreover, calling these things "the only vividnesses" of the place contributes to the leveling of human and thing as factors in how to make sense of it. They all contribute to the aesthetic whole of the story: an impressionistic description of a place, the human and nonhuman bodies in it and the subtle changes in its atmosphere, from stagnant to slightly stirred to stagnant again, like a drink poured from one of the bottles.

Bottles and liquor as material metaphors create intratextual links within the collection. In the passage above, the bright colors and the graceful shapes of the bottles are presented as vivid and disturbing, and accompanied by an invitation to imagine the taste and intoxicating effect of their contents, some of which have already been

brought forth in the descriptions of the café clients and their drinks at the beginning of the story. In "Mixing Cocktails," the frothing cocktails that the narrator-as-child remembers having been so skillful at making, are metaphorically paired with the highly affective vividness of the sea: "It was very difficult to look at the sea in the middle of the day. The light made it so flash and glitter: it was necessary to screw the eyes up tight before looking" (*LB*, 89). This vision recalls the parallelization of the sea, bath-salts and crystal scent bottles in "At the Villa d'Or," with sea and bottles as common denominators (see Section 4.1).

In "Villa D'Or", Mr. Valentine actually also becomes an eager spokesman for the aesthetics of bottles, in an attempt to justify that he is no stranger to "Art":

> Now, for instance: Bottles—the curve of a bottle, the shape of it—just a plain glass bottle. I could look at it for hours...I started life in a chemist's shop—I was brought up amongst the bottles. Now the pleasure I get in looking at a bottle makes me understand artists... (*LB*, 163)

Mr. Valentine's childhood has taught him his aesthetic tastes, just like "Mixing Cocktails" might lead the reader to imagine that the narrator's early affinity with mixing cocktails is bound with the interest in bottles and drink in the later collection, considering the sense of continuity that is produced by the narrating voice. Many stories mention specific drinks, such as "*menthes* of striking emerald" (*LB*, 50) and the *fines à l'eau* of "In a Café." Visually expressed vividness and alcohol also come together in the beginning of Rhys's writing career: according to her unfinished autobiography *Smile Please,* Rhys used black note books to write out her first love affair that had just ended, with quill pens of different colors that she had bought to "cheer up" her bare table. The result was the manuscript of her first, unpublished novel, which she titled *Triple Sec* after the citrus drink (Rhys 1979, 105). The colors were cheerful, but the experience, as described by Rhys, was close to dying, recalling the connection between autobiography and epitaph (see Section 2.1). Erica Johnson and Patricia Moran (2015, 1) see in this moment the beginning of an "affective stance" that colors all Rhys's works. The stance is not defined very clearly, but the combination of bright colors and black notebooks, vivid moments of sense experience and somber themes and moods characterizes it well.

Bottles have a metonymical link to alcoholism and thereby to melancholia/depression, (all of which also plagued the biographical Rhys, see Maslen 2009). Simultaneously, however, the aesthetic

choices in their presentation as vivid, bright and graceful things create a tension with these meanings. The drinks have their place in the aesthetic whole of the collection and the visual sensations it evokes, like the characteristic green absinthe in Toulouse-Lautrec's paintings. The aesthetics tickle the more basic levels of sense-making, too, evoking conceptual metaphors and affective values, especially as they are paired with people presented as thing-like and lacking a spark of life: on a very basic level, bottles filled with sugary, fermented liquid come across as life-generating or enhancing, like the often "misperceived" affordances of food value (Gibson 1979, 128, 131). This connection is re-enforced in the collection *Tigers Are Better-Looking*, in "Till September Petronella," when Petronella and her casual acquaintance order a bottle of "Clicquot"[114] in a pub and the man remarks in what could be a line in an advertisement, "It puts some life into you, doesn't it?" (*TBL*, 26). Petronella, the focal character, agrees, and she leaves the pub not feeling tired "nor even sad" (Ibid., 27). Alcoholic drinks are plausible objects of affective incorporation (see Section 4.1, Colombetti 2016), in that they directly, chemically participate in the creation, enhancement and sustenance of affective states. In Rhys's stories, they are simultaneously connected to pleasure and sadness, depending on the interpretive distance. Both levels of meaning are present and not completely separable, but rather in tension than in harmony with one another.

So far, we have seen that some things in Rhys's stories are literally more vivid than others, as they are personified and given imaginary lines of speech, like the dresses shut in the cupboard by their collector in "Illusion." In "Vienne," there are floods of people *en masse* that appear and disappear, and most of the things also appear potentially purchasable, quickly forgotten items, which only might serve to mark a memory of a place or a period of time ("as many frocks as I liked"; "not a friend, not a pretty frock—nothing left of Vienna," *LB*, 221, 193). However, the story makes an exception with an anthropomorphized sofa. Frances begins a new section with a description of a sofa that resembles, not so much in its form but in its setting within the narrative, the characterizations of temporary companions like André, Tillie or Fischl: "There was a hard, elegant, little sofa in our room, covered with striped, yellow silk—sky-blue cushions. I spent long afternoons lying on that sofa plunged in a placid dream of maternity" (*LB*, 235). In this section, Frances is pregnant and the couple are living in Budapest. Right before the story takes a turn to worse, Frances mentions the "calm sense of power" she gains when lying in a dark room on the sofa, which she associates with her pregnancy; the sofa seems to be incorporated into the affective state.

The sofa makes one more appearance as Frances finds Pierre contemplating suicide with a revolver in his hand. She manages to convince him to plan for escape instead. The section titled



114 *Veuve Clicquot* champagne.

"Catastrophe" ends, the night before their flight, as follows: "I remember the table covered with cigarette-ends and liqueur-glasses, the two empty bottles of champagne, and the little yellow sofa looking rather astonished and disapproving" (*LB*, 242). The sofa is one of the few items in the story that is mentioned twice, which suggests it has been imprinted in the narrator's memory. That she would imagine the sofa having an attitude of astonishment and disapproval is a personifying projection of human emotion.It stems from the earlier incorporation of the sofa into sense of power and belonging in the absence of human connection in Frances and Pierre's desperate situation. In this scene we find another example of affective color produced jointly by an assemblage human and nonhuman bodies, this time including the sofa, cigarette-ends and, once again, glasses and bottles. These singular elements echo similar ones in other stories, weaving further intratextual threads between bottles glasses and vividness.

The sofa in "Vienne" appears like an individual singled out from the masses of things and people found on the pages of the collection. Such underlining is often done on aesthetic grounds: if a thing or a human brings something interesting, often a visual effect, to a scene, the descriptive narration lingers on it slightly longer, and the focalizing characters might give it more attention. The narrator of "In the Luxemburg Gardens" another depressed young man, observes children playing in the park. One of them is called by his name, Raoul, by his nanny, while the focalizer is "gazing morosely at all the other Raouls and Pierrots and Jacquelines in their brightly coloured overcoats" (*LB,* 71). The children are a mass, not saved from this outlook even by their individual names. Then the woman in a green hat enters the scene and steals the young man's attention. The park, as was observed earlier, is the personified thing of this story, but the content of its voiced consolation draws on the image of human bodies wrapped in colorful clothes: "Are there not always Women and Pretty Legs and Green Hats" (*LB*, 72).

The children and the woman, multiplied and generalized at the end, become specimens of park-goers who are part of its visual world, with their brightly colored clothes as a shared feature (the woman is wearing a hat "as green as Raoul's overcoat," *LB*, 71). The story tempts a visualization in which these bright colors light up the somber ambience of the park. It consists of the characteristic light grey of the Paris ground simultaneously with the mind-state of the focalizer, and the two enforce one another. Readers leave the story having encountered the young man, Raoul, the other children, and the woman in the green hat, but their most vivid recollections may well be of a green overcoat and hat, like splashes of color on a light canvas in an impressionist painting (in which women indeed often seem to be swallowed by their hats).

In "Trio," vividness is suggested as an attribute of a human character, but in a way that is close to its attribution to objects. The narrator, describing a group of people in a Paris restaurant who she realizes come from the Caribbean Antilles, uses terminology and stereotypes that read as outright racist:

> The fuzzy, negress' hair was exactly the right frame for her vulgar, impudent, startlingly alive little face: the lips were just thick enough to be voluptuous, the eyes with an expression half cunning, half intelligent. She wore a very short red frock and black, patent leather shoes. Her legs were bare. Suddenly she began to sing: J'en ai marre [...]. As she grew more excited she jumped up, swung her slim hips violently, rolled her eyes, stamped her feet, lifted her skirt [...] (*LB*, 84)

The girl's face is "startlingly alive," which likens her ironically rather to liquor bottles and green hats than to most people. Her presence is framed by her red frock, another splash of color. It is also a familiar thing connected with the Caribbean islands and expatriate women in "Let Them Call It Jazz" and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She is exoticized and thingified, like many other people in the collection, but her actions are completely contrasted with those of most characters in *The Left Bank*: by singing "*J'en ai marre*" ("I've had enough of this"), she voices a sentiment common to many stories, often attributable to the narrator or focalizer, who usually share it with the reader only in a grudging remark rather than by dancing and singing. Here the girl's protest may even be directed at the narrator who imposes racist stereotypes of voluptuousness and vulgarity on her: she has had enough of that, too.

The whole "trio" of people in the story is thingified on the level of the collection, in the sense that they act as a Proustian "madeleine," a memory-aid that operates through the senses that leads the narrator to recall and recount the two following stories, "Mixing Cocktails" and "Again the Antilles": "It was because these were my compatriots that in that Montparnasse restaurant I remembered the Antilles" (*LB*, 85). Once again, in an ironic manner, objectification leads to identification and sympathy: the girl is first made "other" by the narrator's exoticizing gaze, then recognized as "same," a compatriot. Even the narrating voice objectifies itself as an "other." As we have seen, earlier research has importantly recognized the socially defined objectification and otherness that Rhys's (focal) characters experience; Cathleen Maslen (2009, 15) identifies them as suffering from a "culturally informed" condition of "melancholia of otherness" and rightly views their alleged depression more as a malady of the society than individual pathology, whose attribution to a fictional character is always problematic.[115]



115 Similarly, Patricia Moran connects Rhys's aestheticizing tendencies with the processing of painful memory (2007, 3).

The continuing tensions between agency and thingification have aesthetic, ethical, and political grounds and consequences. Rhys's uses of form and color are affected by the visual arts, and so are her tendencies toward grouping, "massification" and typification.[116] The "tacit meanings" arrived at through embodied sense-making rest on the affordances of things such as sofas and bottles that a reader can recognize. Human bodies are likened to these things by way of the repetition of schemas and descriptive formulations that create new habits of meaning to connect with people as well as things. Women in green hats, children in green raincoats and a dancing girl in a red frock are set on the same visual plane with bottles and sofas. Thenarrator ascribes the same function to all of them: the preservation and transmittance of "vividness" and the precarious possibility of happiness. These vivid bodies are contrasted with the masses and the grey color exemplified by the customers of "In a café." Sofas and bottles invite different tacit meaning-making than people by way of incorporation into affective states, while the girl in "Trio" both shares the qualities of vivid things and surpasses them by pronouncing a point of view. She is not only lending power (or in this case, also memory) but also wielding it, despite her thingification as a character.

### 5.1.3. The Author, the Narrator, and Levels of Sense-making

In general, the narrators of many of the stories in *The Left Bank* appear functionally as observers and organizers of aesthetic elements, whose agency reaches beyond the confines of one story. There are strong hints that readers should identify the narrator in the cycle of the Caribbean stories with the author, given the knowledge of Rhys's Caribbean roots. Many of the stories set in Paris offer similar possibilities. This section discusses how the collection-wide narratorial agency and the focalizers of individual stories are related to the authorial agency of the collection, and how these together invite readerly sense-making with material things and thing-like characters.

The implied author of the collection strongly resembles the biographical Rhys. The sense of the presence of an author-figure as an organizer of the textual, aesthetic whole is due, firstly, to the framing

116 These, however, are by no means "purely" aesthetic choices without sociocultural significance in the visual arts, either.

of the collection by the preface as impressions and observations of a "Miss Rhys," with a "profound knowledge of the Left Bank" (Ford 1984, 23), secondly, to the repetition of motifs and schemas, and thirdly, to the sense of continuation in the narrating and focalizing mind styles. Readers familiar with Rhys's fiction and life can view *The Left Bank* as autofictional, like *Sleep It off Lady* (see Section 2.1). Even typographical choices contribute to the same end; for instance, the preference for ellipses in the form of three or four periods throughout the work.[117]

As we have noticed, some stories have first-person intradiegetic narrators, who appear clearly different from the nameless, extradiegetic third-person narrators. However, intradiegetic narrators such as Frances or the unnamed character narrators in "Illusion" and "A Spiritualist" share a similar mind-style with many of the focalizers of the extradiegetically narrated stories, such as Sara of "At the Villa d'Or" or Roseau of "La Grosse Fifi." Sometimes also an extradiegetic narrator can be associated with the same voice.[118] We have seen examples of this voice all through the discussions of the Left Bank stories. It is characterized by a negatively ironic mode expressed by snapping one-liners, and the classifying and typifying, aesthetically thingifying interest in characters and things. In just a few cases, an intradiegetic narrator also comments on her/his position. One was encountered just above, in the transition from "Trio" to the Caribbean stories. Another, at the end of "Hunger," a descriptive account of the first days of living without food, is also an example of the narratorial mind-style at its grimmest: "I have never gone without food for longer than five days, so I cannot amuse you any longer," the narrator states to close the story abruptly (*LB*, 103). This address to the reader draws attention to the narrator-narratee relationship, and underscores the imaginary link between the narrator and an actual author, who is composing these "amusing" stories, and who has had all the experiences they relate. In place of this imaginary construction, it is quite easy to imagine the biographical Jean Rhys.

However, the recognition of the sense of the author's virtual presence in the reading event does not require the reduction of fictional characters, emotions or events to the actual author's biography. I propose that the *sense* of authorial presence behind the text exists as part of the embodied sense-making process of the work, sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker, regardless of the reader's knowledge of biographical details (see Oulanne 2017b). The virtual author is the body we imagine, on our own embodied level, to be behind the organization of things, characters and events that constitute the stories. Following Paul De Man (1979, 921–922), all texts presented with the name of their author are to an extent autobiographical, but they also

117 This is quite a common device, of course, and one used for the effect of impressionistic writing; nevertheless, its constancy here unifies the narrating voices of the collection, as material markers of a continuous presence.

118 Here the concept of 'voice' is more appropriate, as it is used to refer to a sense of continuous identity, not limited to world view.

deny the possibility of actual presence or a totality of identity. The text objectifies its author, as Rhys's narrators objectify themselves and other characters. As Rishona Zimring (2015, 48–49) suggests, *The Left Bank* is aesthetically a skillful creation of masks and poses, combinations of ironic detachment and evoked pleasure, even if Ford's preface to the collection strives to celebrate authenticity rather than artifice.

Some characters other than the focal ones also act as proxies for a leveling inclination toward people and things. In "Illusion," Miss Bruce, the tidy and controlled Englishwoman who is also a secret collector of extravagant clothes and make-up, seems to have the same mildly interested attitude toward her dresses and toward other human beings. This is made clear at the end of the story, in Miss Bruce's comments to the narrator, first about her peculiar hobby, and second about a "plump, dark girl" sitting in a nearby café table: "Why should I not collect frocks? They fascinate me. The colour and all that. Exquisite sometimes!"; "Not bad hands and arms, that girl!" (*LB*, 36). As always in *The Left Bank*, there is irony but also empathic warmth in how Miss Bruce's character is presented. The narrator has stated earlier, in an ambiguous use of the word "nice" typical of the overall voice of the collection: "In fact Miss Bruce was an exceedingly nice woman" (*LB*, 30).

What are the actual ethical considerations invited by such displays of people and things on the level of the whole collection, and how does the aesthetic base affect them? Many of the ethical implications have already been taken up throughout this study: the stories' consciousness-raising about the situation of women in the society and the possibilities of empathy or sympathy between people, often experienced and expressed with the help of inanimate things. At first sight, Rhys's critical "passion for stating the case of the underdog" and "sympathy for [...] law-breakers" (Ford 1927, 24) do not seem to be in line with the aesthetic strategies of thingification, othering typification and massification. The relationship between an objectifying outlook and a critical stance toward such practices in society is not explicit in the story. It is not like the implied author made the narrators perform the gestures of objectification and then, taking an ironical distance, showed the readers the related sociocultural problems, using the narrators as cautionary examples. Rather, the very gestures are often paired with affirmative meanings present in the stories: they are accompanied by a sense of empathy, recognition or belonging, as was observed in Section 4.1, and as can be seen in the ambiguous treatment of the dancing girl in "Trio." The thing-like presentation of a human character does not seem to get on the way of empathy and sympathy, identification, or a sense of belonging and community. This can be sensed on a basic affective level, but it is also part of the critical appraisal of the work.

Furthermore, the level of aesthetics parallels the sensory imagination and the interpretation. If the stories suggest a presence of beauty, even if it is in a thing-like human being as part of a mass or as a type (the models, the "Women and Pretty Legs and Green Hats," or the girl in "Trio"), they also introduce a possibility for at least minimal happiness and connection. In the storyworld, properties that are often considered human, such as the possession and expression of an individual consciousness, do not come across as a prerequisite for "humane" feelings. Overall, as we have seen, the work challenges meanings based on dividing things into subjects and objects. In this case, a notion such as "objectification" all but loses its meaning, and "thingification" means merely being regarded as an animate or inanimate body in space, with affordances for intersubjective or interobjective interaction and aesthetic properties. People are presented mostly as opaque to one another, but this comes across as a basis for an ethics. The passages suggest a non-anthropocentric version the Levinasian approach, in which the face of the other *as* other is seen as morally binding (Levinas 1969). In Rhys's fiction, there are no prerequisites as to what kind of subjectivity lies behind the face, or rather, the surface. Thereby they afford a broad scope of empathy, sympathy, and identification, which involves the nonhuman world. The stories suggest that intersubjective or interobjective phenomena as based on a shared worldly being rather than the attribution of a human mind and subjectivity to nonhuman things. Furthermore, the opaque human bodies are fictional characters made of textual gestures, and a reader can be expected to engage with them as such. As readers of the collection are already positioned within the frame of fictionality, they remain capable of experiencing the opacity partly as a matter of course in a literary device, and of proportioning their ethical consideration of the stances taken by the narrating voice accordingly.

As regards the phenomena of "masses" and "bunches" of people and things, a similar interpretation can be made. The modern condemnation of "the masses" rests on a belief in the primary nature of the human individual as the basis of ethics. Rhys's work likely aims at showing how the value of the individual is challenged by modern capitalism, and how the value of the female individual always seems to be slightly less than that of the male. However, the reciprocation that *The Left Bank* offers is *not* a newly-found celebration of individuality or certain exceptional individuals. It is a more modest suggestion to see possibilities of recognition and identification regardless of how similar to or different from the surrounding other minds and bodies one is. This is not to imply that Rhys's writing proposes an ethical system,in which the human individual has no value except as an object among objects. However, *individualism* has some implications that do not follow the stories' aim. Individualism often rests on the notions of depth and interiority, and an anthro(po)centric preference of the *human* individual in possession of a disembodied self and a rational mind, who is essentially separate from its environment and who tends to appear as masculine. In contrast, if we see

human cognition as embodied and embedded in and extended into its surroundings, the gap between the individual self and the world is made smaller. I hope to have shown that in Rhys's stories, too, characters feel and make sense *with* the world of things, instead of making sense *of* it while remaining separate from it.

Furthermore, the theories of distributed agency presented earlier, do their part in challenging the idea of the human individual as the primary subject of action, and suggest a more inclusive account of subjectivity. They show that even human agency is collaboratively constituted, and that human beings are molded by affective encounters with material things. As Karen Barad writes,

> What if it is only in the encounter with the inhuman—the liminality of no/thingness—in all its aliveness/liveliness, its conditions of im/possibility, that we can truly confront our inhumanity, that is, our actions lacking compassion? Perhaps it takes facing the inhuman within us before com-passion—suffering together with, participating with, feeling with, being moved by—can be lived. (Barad 2015, 8)

Rhys's work does not explicitly propagate such new materialist ends, or a Buddhist inclusive cosmology, for that matter. However, if we do as Rita Felski suggests, and experiment with focusing on the effect that the stories afford, ways of thinking beyond the human individual quite necessarily emerge. The masses of people and things, as Rhys presents them, should not be seen primarily as agents of dehumanization in a sense that would be associated with the modern context of war or the exploitation of labor, for instance. These are true concerns, and present on one of the critical levels of reading that the stories invite. However, the masses and sprinklings of people readers are invited to imagine and enact, along with bunches of lively things, insistently point toward possibilities of recognition and empathy. The affective and aesthetic whole of *The Left Bank,* building on embodied sense-making processes, is a combination of sinister forebodings, critical considerations steeped in irony, and reparative instances in which people and things come together in assemblages that invite readers to enact sympathy, empathy, happiness and belonging. Importantly, the latter meanings are not dependent on the human characters *surpassing* their embeddedness in the world of things and the intersubjective/interobjective world of the crowd and the mass. The mannequins sprinkled on the Paris streets as "human flowers" suggest a sense of belonging regardless of their dehumanization; vivid things on bar counters or brightly colored clothes in the Luxembourg Gardens induce happiness and pleasure primarily *as things*.

Some of Rhys's typifications repeat sexist and racist stereotypes, and the aim of this study is by no means provide an apology for this sort of attitudes, or to present all of them in a light that would somehow magically turn them into affirmative or reparative gestures. An important part of the meaning of the collection is built on tensions and contradictions of sameness and otherness, happiness and despair, agency and objectification. I hope to have shown the variety of different tones and colors that exist in the stories and has potential to exist between the stories and their readers; not in harmony, but in a movement capable of producing meanings on many levels. In that, *The Left Bank* is a mixture of modernist and realist sensibilities, with added impressionistic detail, addressing very topical concerns of alienation and the value of human beings, but doing so in a manner that is not preaching or didactic, but ambiguous and "disturbingly graceful," like the tempting liquor bottles in a Paris café. This is how Rhys's work surpasses its function as contemporary commentary, and justifies the interest of readers one decade after another.

## 5.2 Everything, Something, and Nothing: Meaning and Detail in Djuna Barnes's Stories

> "Is that all?" Said Julie.
> "Isn't it enough?" Answered Wendell.
> "And what does it mean?" said Timothy.
> "Well," answered Wendell, "much and little,
> like all wisdom."
>
> — Djuna Barnes: *Ryder*[119]

During all previous discussions of Barnes's short stories, a number of things and characters have emerged as agents in various assemblages. We have also learned that Barnes's fiction tends to include long descriptive sections dedicated to material detail. As in the case of Rhys's journalistic-impressionistic sketches, a preference for description can point to several directions. Barnes borrows devices and motifs associated with realism and naturalism, but the descriptiveness of her work also reflects modernist tendencies. David Herman points out how for Georg Lukács, modernism's paradoxically alienated "inward turn" resulted in "replac[ing] narration with description" (Herman 2011a, 252; Lukács 1971b). In the modernist case, the focus would be on the description of *experience,* but as we have noticed before, the line between describing experience and describing material surroundings is far from clear in Barnes's work. Barnes's description resembles the way Jonathan Culler has suggested that Flaubert's descriptions move beyond the experience of the focalizer and demonstrate a break between experience and meaning (Culler 1974, 24).

In some cases, the main affective content of a story comes across to the reader by means of description of assemblages and *tableaux*; recall how the boundaries between human bodies and material detail were blurred in "Dusie" and "A Boy Asks a Question" (Section 3.4). This

119 Barnes 2010, 121.

chapter sets out to inspect this form of description and presentation of detail more closely. While Barnes's use of types in characterization has already been discussed (see Section 4.2), her characters nor the things described in her stories do not appear as masses like Rhys's, and neither do the things described. More accurately, they appear in lists and floods, occasionally organized into an assemblage. How does this kind of presentation create meaning, if it does? Where is the modernist experientiality located in such passages, and what means do they have to affect or engage their readers?

As Naomi Schor (1987) has shown, attention to detail in art has been linked with triviality, femininity, decadence, crowds and riots. Thus, detail shares some of the theoretical ballast of Rhys's masses, even though it could be viewed as their opposite, in case there is not too much of it. In classicist as well as modernist theories of art, a good, useful detail is one which contains or produces *meaning* and stays within the confines of the hierarchy and perspective of the whole work, often to be made sense of synecdochically (Ibid., 21, 42, 59). Detail, in these accounts, is often commensurate with material things. In the more modernist end of the spectrum of criticism on literary, material detail, Willa Cather sketches a "Novel Démeublé," with an exclamatory sentence: "how wonderful it would be if we could throw all the furniture out of the window" (Cather 1922, 6). On the other hand, it has been observed how, from 19th century literature onwards, a suspicious regard of description gives way to material things' demand of visibility (Freedgood 2009, 4). Philippe Hamon (1982, 170) suggests that a realist preference for description overrides narration. This has to do with the production of the "reality effect" (Barthes 1968), the presentation of material detail as nonsymbolic and literal, although their referentiality to reality is ultimately an illusion. Barthes's claim has also been questioned based on cognitive narratology with a suggestion that the way narrative details appeal to cognitive frames actually gives them back their referential function (Auyoung 2013, 70). The call to enact the material presence of a detail does not, however, need to render it *representative,* even though it might add *referentiality* to it.

In the psychoanalytical framework, on the other hand, a "good detail" can be characterized as one interpretable by the talking cure, and thereby ultimately able to produce meaning (Schor 1987, 68–75). The material used to form dream-images does not arise from important events in the dreamer's past. Rather, dreams make overdetermined metaphors out of seemingly worthless fragments of the past. Walter Benjamin applies this idea to cultural history by turning his attention toward the material detail of 19th century Paris: "I needn't *say* anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse—these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them" (Benjamin 1999, 460, emphasis in the original). In the psychoanalytic and Benjaminian accounts, seemingly unimportant and excessive detail is given pride of place in the production

of meaning, but the method of each is slightly different. Here, the aim is to show how Barnes "makes use of" her detail, and how her stories bot invite and deny interpretation. Barnes's work balances between tempting her readers to follow a path of symbolic interpretation, as if in relation to dream images, but on the other hand cuts this path short and provides other forms of sense-making instead.

Barnes has definitely not thrown all the furniture out of the window, as Willa Cather would have liked modern fiction to do.[120] On the other hand, the detail in her descriptive passages is not satisfactorily explained by the reality effect, either. The first point of reference to look for when exploring meaning and sense-making in relation to these descriptions is the realm of "inessential" detail that Lukács, for instance, finds in naturalism: "realism whose details have gone bad" (Lucáks 1971b, 60; Schor 1987, 44). We have seen how Barnes's work utilizes naturalist aesthetics and evokes intertextual connections to both decadence and naturalism; we have also noted its parodic relation to some themes and approaches of Freudian psychoanalysis. Consequently, I discuss both psychoanalysis and decadence as intertextual elements rather than potential frameworks for interpretation.

While the previous section discussed sense-making in the context of the whole collection *The Left Bank,* this one looks closely at one story in which the descriptive features come across as especially forceful, "Cassation." The study of Barnes's collections such as *Spillway* or *Collected Stories* as textual wholes is not as necessary as that of *The Left Bank,* since neither of them constitutes a similar totality. Barnes's stories have been published multiple times in several collections, and before that as individual printings in magazines. References to other stories in the *Collected Stories* are made when needed. "Cassation" is also part of a larger whole with a unified narrating voice, namely the cycle of "Madame" stories, along with "The Grande Malade," "Dusie," and "Behind the Heart," all already discussed in the previous chapters. "The Grande Malade," on the basis of its original title "The Little Girl Continues," recounts events following those of "Cassation" (originally "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady"), while the other two are not positioned as clearly on a timeline, except by their location in the *Collected Stories* after the "Little Girl" stories, and the location of their narrated events in Paris.

Katya is the aspiring dancer, cosmopolite and the narrator of at least three of the stories (in "Behind the Heart" she is not named). In Cassation, she tells Madame about a phase of her life in Berlin. In a café, she meets a mysterious older lady named Gaya, who invites her to a house shared with a "declining" husband and a disabled child.

120 Cather does not abide by this rule in her own fiction, either.

In a seemingly mutual, yet silent understanding, Katya accepts the invitation and stays a year. She compares this period to life in a convent as a "*religieuse*." She also describes it as happy, serene and rewarding coexistence of the two women, consisting of walks in the garden and discussions about philosophy and life. The husband and child are seen and heard only occasionally. Their haunting presence, along with Gaya's display of signs of worry, leads Katya to think that "there was trouble in other parts of the house" (*CS*, 384). After a year, the atmosphere and Gaya's behavior change. She asks Katya not to go out any more, to take care of her disabled child and stay "forever" in the house, without leaving the child's bedroom; her discourse is more distracted than previously. Katya does not want to do this, and leaves, in spite of proclaiming her love for Gaya. She returns once, to find the older woman succumbed to a mental state beyond language, manifested by lying in bed beside the child and making a buzzing noise. The end is a departure similar to many of Barnes's stories. "Go away," Gaya retorts; Katya goes and briefly concludes her narrative: "Things are like that, when one travels, *nicht wahr*, Madame?" (*CS*, 392).

In addition to the ending, "Cassation" shares many themes and motifs with other stories discussed in this study: there is a slightly twisted Oedipal schema involving a "weak" or "declining" man, a child and a woman-as-child, and tones of seduction; there is also a *sense* of psychological drama, realized ambiguously and theatrically by characters with unreadable minds. Even Katya, when telling the story, refrains from any self-narration, apart from her defamiliarizing description of her initial experience of living with Gaya: "It was that I was happy" (*CS*, 387). A distributed sense of affectivity is expressed by her sensing trouble "in the house"; she also asks Gaya, more specifically, "Why is it that you suffer so" (*CS*, 391), but Gaya also seems to remain opaque to her. The action of the narrative is constructed following a pattern familiar from other stories, such as "Aller et Retour," "Spillway," "A Boy Asks a Question," and "Dusie": an arrival at a house, a conflict involving members of an actual or an allegorical family, and a departure.

Katya's describes the experience relies largely on material instead of psychological detail. These descriptions have a tendency to extend so that they stand out in the context of the whole story; they do so also because of the repetition of expressions and structures occurring within and across stories. Katya describes the first bedroom she sees, the one with Valentine, the child, lying in the middle of a large bed:

> Everything was disorderly, and expensive and melancholy. Everything was massive and tall, or broad and wide. A chest of drawers rose above my head. The china stove was enormous and white, enameled in blue flowers. The bed was so high that you could only think of it as something that might be overcome. The walls were all bookshelves, and all the books were bound in red morocco, on the back of each, in gold, was stamped a coat of arms, intricate and oppressive. [...] (*CS*, 384–385)

After an ekphrastic description of a painting that hangs over the bed, (a battle scene with charging horses), and some more words dedicated to the bed ("The sheets were trailing, the counterpane hung torn, and the feathers shivered along the floor [...]", *CS*, 385), a human element is introduced in the middle of the fictional assemblage: "[...] it was not until some moments later that I saw a child, not more than three years old, a small child, lying in the center of the pillows, making a thin noise, like the buzzing of a fly, and I thought it was a fly" (*CS*, 385). The two women do not discuss the child. Katya leaves, only to come back later the same night, and Gaya lets her in through a window to another bedroom that is to become hers. Another description follows:

> It was a beautiful room, Madame, 'traurig' as she said. Everything was important and old and gloomy. The curtains about the bed were red velvet, Italian you know, and fringed in gold bullion. The bed cover was a deep red velvet with the same gold fringe: on the floor, beside the bed, a stand on which was a tasselled red cushion, on the cushion a Bible in Italian, lying open. (*CS*, 386)

The two descriptions are variations of the same wording and rhythm: first everything is disorderly, expensive, melancholy, massive and tall, broad and wide; then everything is important, old and gloomy. Image schemas of largeness and heaviness dominate the first room, while the second appeals to a sense of color and texture, evoking haptic affordances of surfaces to be touched. Both refer to luxurious materials in the colors of red and gold. The construction of the passages, beginning with "everything" and leading to detailed descriptions, creates a sense of excess even though the style of neither is particularly flamboyant per se: the adjectives used are matter-of-fact ones that denote color, material, and size. However, the very fact that there is *so much of* this description of material detail causes it to take on a sense of excess, "detail gone bad." As the characters and their actions remain opaque, readerly attention is directed toward existents instead of events. What kind of sense-making is invited by a text like this, which of its features have the potential to attract and affect, and what interpretations do its devices of presentation make possible? The following sections answer these questions first by inspecting allegorical interpretation questioned and enhanced by an "archaeological" one, then comparing these with embodied cognitive approaches, and finally returning to the ways meanings are produced by a narratorial presence.

## 5.2.1. Collecting References: from Allegory to Archaeology and Back

The application of the term "archaeological" in this context is inspired by Elaine Freedgood's (2009) study of objects in Victorian literature, as well as Naomi Schor's (1987) method of tracing meanings in relation to detail in the history and theory of art. In these studies, the thing or the detail invites a historical survey of cultural meanings, beside a symbolic interpretation. I do not mean to overlook symbolic meanings, but approach them through an orientation toward the surface of the text *underneath* which we habitually expect meaning to reside. As Freedgood suggests, commenting on the "showers" of things in Victorian literature, they "often overwhelm us at least in part because we have learned to understand them as largely meaningless" (Freedgood 2009, 1). Freedgood follows a Benjaminian "rag-picker" approach to detail when stating that "the reader who wishes to recover (or rather, imagine) the material qualities of fictional things must avoid the temptations of allegory and follow instead the protocols of the collector" (Freedgood 2009, 2). A collector, in this sense, does not look for definite relations and properties of things, but "shows" things as found objects together based on their affinities in space and time, and the history that "haunts" them (Ibid., 3).

The form and style of Victorian literature, which Freedgood focuses on, justifies the archaeological approach better than the texts and contexts under scrutiny here. The modernist gesture of showing the world of things (and details) as experienced, and the experiencing consciousness as embedded in the world, already begins to challenge the duality of the detail as either symbolic or insignificant. Thereby modernist fiction might invite readers to consider details as parts of the lived world, significant in themselves. Furthermore, in short stories, the very constrictions of textual space suggest that the details of the material world that get to be mentioned *must be* significant. They may tempt a mode of reading that Schor attributes to figures such as Sigmund Freud and Sherlock Holmes: the assumption that detail, even if it seems excessive, is significant as a clue that points toward a revelation (Schor 1987, 65–78), or as a "red herring" set to lead the reader astray. However, the challenges presented by Barnes's flood-like descriptions are different from what can be expected of the modernist minimalism of carefully selected, meaningful things. Thus, in Barnes's case, readers' initial approach to the flood of detail might not lead to a sense of meaninglessness, assuming that they are familiar with other modernist fiction. Rather, the way the text itself presents details and things, may deny the meaning these readers are looking for, while affording other, more basic and embodied forms of sense-making. The discussion of this section is partly inspired by Thing Theory's suggestion of things that resist meaning, but it also

suggests that some levels of meaning are actually dependent on our experience of things (cf. Brown 2004).

According to Schor, modernist detail appears as particular but abstract, an allegory without transcendence: "a parody of the traditional theological detail" (Schor 1987, 60–91;). In the case of "Cassation," the bedrooms in the descriptions quoted above appear as allegorical in that the things they present seem to be excessive as regards their possible "practical" uses in the story: among them, there is no Chekhovian gun whose presentation would mean that it will be "used" in some further part of the story. Moreover, they are formally related to *tableaux vivants*, or still-lifes (in the absence of a human element), and thereby also accompanied with a cultural convention to assume them to have at least some allegorical content. Their cryptic and archaic language has a similar effect. However, the guidelines given by the text for readers to fill the gaps in meaning prove to be misleading. After providing a brief example of the allegorical lures of the story, I follow Freedgood's metonymical-archaeological approach, to map some of the adjacent domains of meaning that "haunt" "Cassation," namely *Catholic kitsch, decadence* and *psychoanalysis.*

The Bible in Italian that is lying open on the cushion on the stand in the second bedroom, is a reference to the Christian faith and to Roman Catholicism. Even though Katya describes her stay in the house as a religious experience and compares herself to a nun, the period is framed by luxury rather than by the asceticism and abstinence associated with a convent. She uses ambiguous words to describe her experience: "a religion, Madame, that was empty of need, therefore it was not holy perhaps, and not as it should have been in its manner" (*CS*, 387). She is not betrothed to Christ, as a nun would be; if Katya is someone's "bride," it is Gaya's, which is perhaps not "as it should have been in its manner" because their relation also resembles that of mother and daughter. On the other hand, Katya is supposed to act as a surrogate mother for the child, who in its otherworldliness associates with Christ. However, the child has no resurrection or redemption to offer, quite the opposite: it seems to signify madness and emptiness, "vacancy" (*CS*, 391). Ludwig, the declining husband, is at best a parody of a paternal god-figure, like the slightly extraneous Joseph, if we stay within the framework of the Holy Family.

"Cassation" tempts an interpretation in the light of Christian allegory, or at least a decadent parody of it. However, the allegory seems to be challenged so much by the fluctuating and overlapping roles the characters play in it, that any pattern of such explanation would seem too rigid and bound to leave out something essential. The excess of material (be it concrete material things or other references) is presented *as if* it formed an essential part of the allegorical

whole, but it never does: the "gloom" and "importance" of the room, the "intricate and oppressive" coats of arms on the back of books in red morocco, the war paintings and the general sense of mysticism, as well as the roles and dynamics of the characters alternating between nun, bride, mother, daughter, Christ and Mary refuse to make a meaningful totality. The allegorical tableau refuses to be read, like the Bible in the storyworld ("lying open at a page that I could not read," *CS*, 387); there is simultaneously too much of "everything," and too little: references to "vacancy," "emptiness" and "nothing" are repeated in Gaya's speech. The reader seems to be led to the brink of allegorical explanation only to step back confused, with a sense of the affective movements and a general ambience instead of an explanation. As Deborah Parsons (2003, 22) suggests about Barnes's early stories and plays, Barnes seems to be mocking everyone "reading for meaning."

In an archaeological reading, the framework of Catholic Christianity is rather an expressive style than as an explanation. Similarly, the Bible in the story is primarily a thing, expressive in its material being, rather than a book whose contents could be read and understood by Katya. The style of the room, with its red and gold colors and the velvet fabrics surrounding the "*religieuse*" and the bible, recalls Papal luxury, but it also refers to royal abodes; it might even pass as a luxurious brothel.

In Barnes's use, Catholic iconography in general has a considerable amount of common ground with *kitsch*: repeatable, affordable, consumable reproductions of "beautiful" or "artistic" objects made of cheap materials, and copies of religious objects such as statues, pictures and rosaries (see Calinescu 1987, 226–229). In "Cassation," kitsch is present in references to Valentine, the child implicitly present in the passages quoted above. She (or "it," the pronoun used in the story discourse) lies as if hidden in plain sight, on the huge bed in the middle of the room, surrounded by all its massive and ornamental furniture and the picture of a battle, like a "putto," a baby angel in a baroque illustration. Katya also formulates this association in a simile: "It was beautiful in the corrupt way of idiot children [...] like those dwarf angels on holy prints and valentines" (*CS*, 388). Here the allegorical tendencies of the story appear on a formal, aesthetic level, as the child is presented in an impressive tableau, as though in an emblem, and compared to the pictorial motif of "dwarf angels." Once again, the emblem remains ambiguous. Valentine is associated with Christ, the playful baby angels that might surround him in a religious, symbolically loaded picture, and romantic greeting cards.

Katya's description of Valentine combines the schematic lightness and newness of kitsch objects and greeting cards (mass-produced and made of cheap, light materials) with the heavy, old, emblematic room. The kitsch objects are associated with another story from the same period, namely "Aller et Retour," in which the variety of objects Madame von Bartmann encounters in Marseilles includes arrangements of funeral wreaths with embossed tin images of the "bleeding heart" (part of Catholic iconography as a symbol for Christ's love for

humanity) as well as lightly pornographical postcards ("showing women in the act of bathing; of happy mariners leaning above full-busted sirens with sly cogged eyes" *CS*, 363).[121] The effect achieved is a conceptual blend of the visual and haptic spheres. Instead of acting as help for allegorical meaning, the blend evokes metonymical connections. Valentine, the postcards and the embossed tin decorations create a tension between high and low, "important, old and gloomy" and frivolous, cheap and naughty. This is clearly a parodic and cheerfully blasphemous gesture. It also participates in the basic aesthetic sense-making in the same manner as Rhys's bunches and masses were shown to do, by appealing to our embodied sensations and perceptions of things in the form of image schemas while also showing their cultural connections.

Decadence, like kitsch, is a phenomenon partly defined by an allowing relation to detail (Calinescu 1987, 161). Barnes's connections with decadence have been pointed out by earlier research (see Taylor 2012, 1–3; Sherry 2014). Intertextually, both the qualities of the things in the passages of "Cassation" (antiquities, luxurious materials of velvet and leather, gold and red) and their way of presentation recalls the lists of curiosities collected by protagonist Des Esseintes in J.K. Huysmans' *À Rebours* (1884), a staple work of decadence, and the repetition of a similar topos in Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Both novels can be cited as examples of the illumination of the detail at the expense of the whole: the flow of both narratives is interrupted by catalogues of things that go on for entire chapters. The decadent style is ornamental and emphasizes the singularities of small units at the expense of *unity,* overall effect, which is why the detail in it tends can be seen as *excessive* (Schor 1987, 43; Calinescu 1987, 161; Bernheimer 2003, 18). The excessivity can also be questioned, however, depending on how "overall effect" is defined. In the discussion of affective dynamics in the earlier chapter, we have seen how initially conflicting descriptions and their stray detail contribute to an overall *effect* as assemblages, even if they might not yield to an overall *interpretation.* The list-like passages in "Cassation," or in Huysmans and Wilde, may cause a reader to lose their way toward an expected turn or resolution of the plot, or to become highly interested in the different form of presentation. In any case, the aesthetics and materialities of the things presented embed the whole narrative in a multisensory experience of luxurious things in their color, scent, taste, sound, and texture. Besides undergoing story-driven experiences solicited by these fictional things, a reader is also able to recognize and engage with the list form as a literary means of expression.

121 Later, when her daughter asks Madame whether there is anything nice in Marseilles, she smiles and recalls exactly these two things: "The Bleeding Heart—sailors—" (*CS*, 366).

The literary framing of these lists suggests the possible assertion of each thing as noteworthy in itself, for having made it to the list, even if they do not conform to a totality of interpretation.[122] In Barnes's case, especially, the detail is significant from the point of view of the affective potential of the work, as it has been included in the fictional assemblages on its pages and the phenomenon of reading. decadence participates to these ends as a cultural "thing" like Catholic iconography and kitsch. These cultural, intertextual associations, partly built on embodied schemas, are summoned in the sense-making process the reader is invited to take part in, enacted beside the experientiality of affordances and habits suggested by the references to material detail.

In addition to an intertextually vibrant style and subject-matter, Barnes's short stories also allude to decadence by way of the idea of concrete *decay.* Physical decay is present in the historical decadent literary style as well, stemming especially from decadent considerations of hereditary flaws in Emile Zola's work. In "Cassation," the "declining" husband Ludwig and the disabled Valentine suggest this interpretation. Material things decay also in "Aller et Retour": two chairs (also presented more specifically as ones with "carved legs") have broken during the mother's absence from the house, as Richter bashfully confesses. In "Spillway," the topos of material decay in the paternal house reaches comical proportions. Upon her arrival, Julie tells Paytor (who is still alive and well, in contrast to the other fathers and husbands, though apparently not for long) she is glad he has taken down the crystals she always hated, to which Paytor replies: "I didn't, the roof fell in—just after my last visit to you in December" (*CS*, 270).

The surprising introduction of a roof falling in adds to the high-strung drama of "Spillway" a touch of the slapstick comedy elements recurrent in Barnes's work. This kind of comedy is not a customary part of decadent aesthetics, whereby readers face a stylistic blend that produces parodic effect. Barnes can indeed be said to approach a decadent literary style in a typical parodic tone that shows reverence for the past text while making fun of a phenomenon or an ideology (Taylor 2014, 56–57; Hutcheon 1985, 35). In Barnes's stories, the gesture of blending heavy and solemn elements with light and comical ones permeates the levels of thematics, style, and the fictional world. All these contribute to the affective "path" of making sense of the work that the reader is invited to follow while reading the story. Furthermore, if the stories are read as part of a collection, the tendency of recycling and repeating motifs and topoi between stories causes an associative, affective path to form throughout them. In this context, the references to literary decadence and material decay constitute an assemblage of their own, the cultural meanings supported by the material detail and vice versa.

122 Some "Object-Oriented" philosophers use the humorous term 'Latour litanies' to denote such lists, common in the writings of their field, in which the objects or phenomena participating in an event are listed to highlight the equal importance of each of them (Bogost 2012, 38–39).

The final frame of reference to be discussed in this archaeological survey of detail is Freudian psychoanalysis. In the earlier chapters, the parodic relationship of Barnes's work to psychoanalytical schemas and motifs has already been pointed out on several occasions, which is why it does not require a lengthy discussion here. In "Cassation," the unreal atmosphere, the ellipses in the events, the patterns of family combined with the overtones of seduction, as well as the "excess" of detail tempt readers to look at the detail as if it were material for a symbolic interpretation of a dream or a symptom. However, as the cast of "Cassation" does not quite fit into an allegory of the Holy Family, the Oedipal family as a frame of explanation is not sufficient, either. The way the women take up agency and desire is psychoanalytically relevant, but in a parodic relationship to the Freudian framework, as we saw in the discussion of Barnes's fetishism (see Section 3.2). The potential oedipal drama between Katya, Gaya, and other players is never acted out. In "Cassation," descriptions of slight movements remain most poignant: hands touching fabrics, taking off and putting on clothes, touching the pages of the bible, like an intimate ritual, or like a dream. The text offers no final interpretation of the excess of detail.

Except for outright allegorical tales such as fables, fiction is bound to host an interpretive excess: not all elements of a story fit into the overall picture, and a totalizing interpretation is very seldom what any literary researcher would be looking for. In this sense, most narratives are "decadent" as to their details. Furthermore, a Freudian frame of reference could even incorporate the "excess" of detail and see it as a clue, a proof of overdetermination, in the manner of dreamwork and screen-memories (see Schor 1987, 75). However, he "translation" of an array of objects into representations of genitalia, and fabrics and spaces into the representation of the maternal does not do justice to the aim of this study, namely the investigation of the effects and senses of the very materiality of things. This materiality, so clearly present in Barnesian detail, constitutes an excess that cannot be restored even to a Freudian (dream) interpretation. Rather, the Freudian framework is one more sphere of ideas that is taken into the assemblages of the stories and their combinations. Together with decadence and Catholically influenced kitsch, it participates in the interplay of high and low, heavy and light, realized through culturally defined concepts but also on the embodied schematic level, by combining thematics of the basic struggles of human sexuality and development with a lightly parodic attitude to their handling.

This reading has shed light on the spheres of meaning, the "ideas" (all of which participate in and draw on the history of ideas) that the material detail evokes, while letting the things remain "literal," so as not to reduce them to any one framework of interpretation. However, considering the aims of this study, the fictional *materiality* of the

things in these associations, as well as the embodied schemas that the associations themselves seem to call forth, needs more attention. In this vein, like in the discussion of Rhys's work above, some questions need to be asked about *how* the things and ideas in the stories mean. A focus on embodied sense-making helps us approach the initial challenge of symbolic interpretation provided by the text, without disregarding its allegorical gestures in the name of "surface reading." How does the very materiality and thingness of things, along with the materiality of words used to express ideas, affect the construction of symbols, allegories and metaphors in the story? The question implies that, contrary to Freedgood's proposition presented above, attention paid to allegory does not necessarily mean letting materiality slip away from the attention of the researcher (cf. Freedgood 2009, 2, 12).

### 5.2.2. The Materiality of the Symbolic

To explore how things mean, we need to once again focus on how the very sensuous qualities evoked by the descriptions of material detail engage readers in *making sense* of the work at hand. The enactive and embodied cognitive approaches to reading are combined with the context of meaning and interpretation: how is the way we interpret texts such as "Cassation" built on the initial enactive engagement with the materialities evoked in it? The discussion above pointed at the embodied senses of not only concrete material things, but also attributes such as 'high' and 'low' and 'heavy' and 'light', which can be attached equally to concrete and abstract things. Thus the things become party of both the basic sense-making invited by a natural environment and more complex forms of interpretation. To explore these levels of sense-making, symbolic and metaphorical readings are set in dialogue with the theory of conceptual metaphor as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980).

Lakoff and Johnson suggest that metaphorical thinking, in the form of image schemas, permeates our everyday language and ways of conceptualization. The way these schemas are constructed has to do with our experience of inhabiting the spatial dimensions of the world: "that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment" (Lakoff & Johnson 2003, 14). The schemas are such simple notions as "up" or "high," and their metaphorical use means that these notions go together with attributes such as, in the case of "up" and "high," "good," "more," or "conscious." Furthermore, as briefly noted before, for a large part constitute the physical environment in which we move and act, and therefore also of our meaning-making. Culturally defined and shared meanings that also affect our sense-making do not constitute a separate layer of experience, but are grounded the same metaphorical system. So-called "higher-order knowledge structures" build on the basic

limitations and affordances of what kind of bodies we have and how they can interact with the world.

The aim of the following analysis is to look once again at "Cassation" and the sense-making invited by it, not only to inspect a basic layer of affective[123] sense-making, but to focus on how embodied experiences of materiality are involved in the metaphorical and symbolic levels of meaning.[124] Firstly, let us look once more at the descriptive passages in "Cassation" quoted at the beginning of this section. Both passages are descriptions of a room (the bedroom where Valentine is sleeping, and the other one which Katya is invited to stay in) and the things contained in that room, a feature that already by itself serves to enact a sense of closed space, a schema of containment. What is contained within the spaces is less concrete. The word "everything" is used at the beginning of both descriptive passages: "Everything was disorderly, and expensive and melancholy. Everything was massive and tall, or broad and wide"; "Everything was important and old and gloomy." The repetition raises it out of the text as somehow meaningful. In contributes to the sense of the room as a totality. It is also noteworthy that in both passages, the word "everything" is actually used in the concrete meaning of "all things." It refers to the physical reality of things that then collaborate in forming the ambience of the fictional room.

The adjectives used to define "all things," however, are diverse: disorderly, expensive, melancholy, massive, tall, broad, wide; important, old, gloomy, deep. In the first passage, words denoting size dominate the more detailed descriptions of things, which follow the initial list of adjectives to define "everything" ("The china stove was enormous and white, enameled in blue flowers. The bed was so

123 Lakoff and Johnson do not discuss their metaphors and sense-making as predominantly affective, and neither does Johnson's later account that develops the theory (Johnson M. 2008). However, based on the later enactivist notions of sense-making in general as affective (Colombetti 2013, Di Paolo 2014, Maiese 2015), and for the sake of continuity within this study, it is justifiable to add this term to the discussion of this section, too.

124 'Metaphor' is here, like in Lakoff and Johnson's work, used in a broad sense, not restricted to the actual trope in literary language. The definition of 'symbol' is included in this broader metaphorical thinking, but as a special case: "Something that stands for, represents, or denotes something else (not by exact resemblance but by vague suggestion, or by some accidental or conventional relation); esp. a material object representing or taken to represent something immaterial or abstract [...]; a representative or typical figure, sign, or token" (OED). Symbolic interpretation here, as before, refers to the assumption of another level or framework of meaning behind a fictional item, while a symbol is something recognizable as such because of this underlying framework. 'Allegory', on the other hand, denotes a totality of meaning in which all systems in a fictional assemblage would be party of. In contrast, anything can be a metaphor, and it does not require an underlying system to interpret it, yet the alleged arbitrariness of metaphor is slightly challenged by the conceptual account, as it demonstrates how the most everyday metaphors rely on embodied perceptions shared by human beings.

high that…"), although "expensive" is also present in the references to luxurious materials. The characterizations of the room recall the culturally shared meanings that point toward Roman Catholicism, decadence and psychoanalysis, but they also involve the realm of the senses. The softness of the velvet of the curtains and the bed cover, the "red morocco" leather of book-covers, the glitter of gold in fringes and tassels, all of which appeal to the reader's sensory imagination and contribute to the experientiality of the passage via Katya's focalization, are also present in the cultural meanings: they affect the very ways of understanding and imagining concepts such as 'kitsch' and 'luxury'. Barnes's text mixes these concrete images with adjectives such as "expensive," "melancholy," and "gloomy," with their own metaphorical relations to embodied schemas (melancholy/gloomy=heavy, dark, stagnant, down; expensive=bright, pleasant, up etc.). There are no exact matches but a more varied result with its tensions, which is likely to contribute to the aesthetic appeal of the passages and the stories.

References to size are of interest here, as they rely on the bodily proportions of the narrator and invite a version of the fictionalization of the reader's virtual experience as a way to enact the experience of space (see Section 2.1; Caracciolo 2014b, 160). That a chest of drawers "rises" above one's head relies on a schema of verticality that is initially defined by the typically erect, bipedal posture of a human being and its sensorimotor affordances (see Johnson 1987, xiv). Hereby the visual experience of a tall item is attained by raising our gaze along with it, while the thing itself actually does not rise; here we are reminded of Vernon Lee's exemplification of aesthetic empathy with the sense of a mountain "rising" in the horizon (see Section 4.1). The bed, on the other hand, is "so high that you could only think of it as something that might be overcome." These descriptions show Katya's body as dwarfed by the furniture (also including the "enormous" china stove), but the creative use of what Lakoff and Johnson would call "new metaphor" complements size and verticality with other schematic meanings: in addition to its height, the bed becomes for Katya both a threat and something to conquer, an adversary or an obstacle. Katya's mind style as an experiencing narrator demonstrates a certain attitude to the world, in which a very high thing means a thing to be overcome, not to be hindered by or crushed underneath.

The bed actually becomes a metaphorical locus of a sense of opposition and battle, and, typically for Barnes's work, this schematic metaphor spills over the edges of one story. In "Cassation," the description of Valentine's room, before introducing the child, diverts into an ekphrastic sequence:

> A great painting hung over the bed; the painting and the bed ran together in encounter, the huge rumps of the stallions reined into the pillows. The generals, with foreign helmets and dripping swords, raging through rolling smoke and the bleeding ranks of the dying, seemed to

> be charging the bed, so large, so rumpled, so devastated.
> The sheets were trailing, the counterpane hung torn,
> and the feathers shivered along the floor, trembling
> in the slight wind from the open window. (*CS*, 385)

There is no other explanation given to the state of the bed but the proximity with the battle depicted in the painting, whereby the two items together create a metonymical type of meaning. The fictionally actual bed is rumpled and the feathers from its depths "shiver" and "tremble" because of the wind that blows into the room from a window, but also as though they were reacting to the doubly fictional representation of the tumult of battle in the painting. The subject-matter of the picture, which also takes up a lot of space as a thing in the fictionally actual space, is shown as "charging" from the canvas to the bed and to the room. In this sense, through Katya's description, the bed comes to embody simultaneously the opponent in a battle and the battleground.

The metaphor of the bed as a battleground is applied in other stories as well, whereby it becomes something of a symbol within the closed system of Barnes's stories. For instance, the schematic connotation comes across in "Aller et Retour," when Madame von Bartmann schools Richter in the good and bad that is in life, in highly metaphorical terms:

> Horses hurry you away from danger; trains bring
> you back. Paintings give the heart a mortal pang—
> they hung over a man you loved and perhaps
> murdered in his bed. [...] Contemplation leads to
> prejudice; and beds are fields where babies fight a
> losing battle. Do you know all this? (*CS*, 370)

This passage becomes more meaningful when looked at in the context of the whole collection and its private symbolism that draws on both common cultural meanings and shared embodied, metaphorical schemas. Horses, along with trains, are involved in the same schematic sphere with paintings, beds, battles and babies, embodying (this time quite concretely), tumult and the power to charge and to resist. They also appear as such in "A Night among the Horses" (see Section 3.2.2). Overall, the *metaphorical* content in this passage is new and creative in its way of combining very different schemas: the association of battle and murder with the softness of beds and the innocence of babies, for instance.

A reader of "Aller et Retour" might also be aware of the placement of these things together in "Cassation": the concrete position of the baby in the middle of the bed enforces the feeling of softness that clashes

with the battle and the horses surrounding it, as it were, charging from the painting in the description. Beds do not equal safety in this symbolic system, even though their softness and association with private space and sleep might do so in an embodied schematic understanding. As was noted in the discussion of the domestic spaces in Barnes's fiction (Section 2.1.2), the house/home itself also becomes the locus of murder and danger (as the discussion in "Aller et Retour" takes place in "the home," the "back" at the beginning of Madame von Bartmann's speech seems to refer to this place). Generally, the aesthetics employed by Barnes rest on the clash of habitual conceptual metaphors and a private symbolism, which gives rise to new, poetic metaphors. Both systems rest partly on embodied sense-making, partly on cultural meanings shared by the authorial audience.

The use of the motif of the child as symbolic in "Cassation" and "Aller et Retour" is affected by the material detail that it is surrounded by. A symbolic reading is certainly one that all the framing of the child-as-motif points toward. Valentine is a thing among things in various senses: it is referred to as "it"; it is human and has a name, but it does not move or speak, and even the name, Valentine, seems to be a symbolic gesture instead of a denominator of a human individual. Valentine is a paradoxical symbol of the "non-symbolic," in the way the child is shown to be untouched by language, making its own buzzing noise. There are also other ways in which Valentine as a symbol remains mute: the polysemy of the whole assemblage denies an exact reference to any outside symbolic system of the type "Valentine=Christ" (a special child, surrounded by Christian references, presented in an emblematic tableau with a parodic version of the holy family), or "Valentine=depression" (a condition beyond language in an "oppressive" maternal house, defined by "vacancy" stagnation or "cassation": cf. Kristeva 1989). In the spirit of Thing Theory, we can see Valentine as a thing that *resists* the interpretation, evasive and untouchable like the Heideggerian *Ding* in its *Dingheit* (Brown 2004, 4–5; Heidegger 1971). However, as Jane Bennett points out (2010, 1–2), the potential for agency in things goes beyond resistance. Reading Barnes with the help of embodied cognitive approaches seems to suggest that this vibrancy of things applies to their meaning as well.

In this light, a more plausible interpretation would be that Valentine actually does *mean,* not in spite of but because of "its" presentation as a thing, similarly to how the china-stove, the painting and the bed mean. First, the way the child is framed by the material detail presents it to us as a *meaningful thing,* an object of interest toward which the narration of the story gravitates. Secondly, the description of the surrounding materialities evokes schemas of containment, bodily force, and heaviness, which are combined with cultural-symbolical meanings around kitsch, decadence, and the allegorical families of both Christianity and psychoanalysis, leading further to new and creative metaphorical expressions of the bed as a battle-scene, the house as a luxurious convent, the child as an angel beyond redemption. These together

constitute a symbolic system within the collection, of which Valentine is part. In this chain of meaning, the material is essentially linked with the symbolic, not an alternative to it.

This reading of Barnes's story shows how things are not foreign to meaning or interpretation, and how to find meaning in a thing does not have to equal imposing an interpretive framework on it or delve underneath its surface to find what is hidden. If the way we constantly interact with material things is crucial to our ways of making sense of the world, and the world that appears to us is always already colored by significance in the form of affordances and evaluative affectivity (Gibson 1979; Colombetti 2013) then there is no way that things would not "have meaning." In the context of Barnes's fiction, this meaning is created as an interplay of references within and without the fictional world and between the stories, with intermingled evocations of the material and the cultural. When granting the senses access to the domain of sense-making, we might actually not always need to shed symbols and metaphors to appreciate the materiality of things: on the contrary, that very materiality is necessarily at the core of our sense-making also on a metaphorical and symbolic level, and can be studied alongside these processes.

### 5.2.3. Meaning in Gestures

Some passages of "Cassation" have now received detailed attention; this section is dedicated to the discussion of the entire story, and its use of the narratorial voice. We have seen how sense-making when reading "Cassation" can be driven by the affective, sensorimotor processes of imagining that a reader goes through while reading a story and encountering the things-presented-as-significant in it. This is not to say that the whole (the descriptive passage, the fictional space, the story) and its parts (the material detail, particular words and phrases) would make up a synecdochical entity, which still would result in one coherent meaning, an ontologically separate thing available to be discovered by interpretation. In some types of short fiction, this kind of logic is certainly at play: if "Cassation" was aimed to be read as detective fiction, the detail in it would present itself as clues, and Katya as the focalizer would appear as a sleuth figure. If we follow Naomi Schor's comparison of Freud with Sherlock Holmes, a psychoanalytical approach, which would partly—but *only* partly—be in line with Barnes's subject-matter, calls for a similar approach with respect to detail.

However, there is no temptation for detective work in "Cassation." Katya's narrating voice does not encourage us to picture her as the reader's surrogate as an agent whose task is to find clues and make deductions, interpreting a mystery parallel to the task of the reader interpreting the short story (cf. Caracciolo 2012). She spends no time or words wondering about things that might be considered peculiar: Gaya's invitation, the decorations of the rooms and the battleground-bed, the child and the husband, Gaya's subsequent demands and descent into a catatonic state. There is no narrative suspense related to the discovery of a "secret," the belated noticing of Valentine on the bed, or Gaya's psychological change; nor are they presented as moments of tragic culmination. The case is rather the opposite, as can be read in Katya's matter-of-fact statement at the end of the story: "Things are like that, when one travels, *nicht wahr,* Madame?" (*CS*, 392). The story is full of peculiar *things*, but what its narrator has to say about them is simply that they "are like that." The "*nicht wahr*" invites a confirmation for this in the narratee and the reader, even though what has just been read is more likely to be strange than familiar.

In the recourses to sentences like "*nicht wahr*, Madame," the reader becomes the recipient of a plea that denotes the ethos of the whole story in a gesture: a plea to accept "things as they are," even though they might be counterintuitive. Thus, readers are invited to broaden their experiential horizon and, likely in the case of readers contemporary to the publication of the story, to "try on" a new, accepting stance toward love between women or the role of a mother. Furthermore, rather than appealing to a reader's curiosity to find out what is *behind* the things (what the behavior of the women is a symptom of), Katya's narration, affirmed by the silent Madame, seems to be saying: "This is *everything* there is."

An intratextual echo that supports this reading is found in "Aller et Retour," in Madame von Bartmann's instructional speech to her daughter:

> "Life", she said, "is filthy; it is also frightful.
> There is everything in it: murder, pain, beauty,
> disease—death. Do you know this?"
>
> The child answerred, "Yes."
>
> "How do you know?"
>
> The child answered again, "I don't know."
>
> "You see!" Madame von Bartmann went on, "you know nothing. You must know everything, and then begin. You must have a great understanding, or accomplish a fall." [...]
>
> "Think everything, good, bad, indifferent;
> everything, and do everything, everything!"
> (*CS*, 370–371, emphasis in the original)

Madame von Bartmann emerges as a guiding voice also for a reader who may be struggling to figure out how to make sense of "Aller et Retour," and experiencing similar difficulties with "Cassation." The presence of a "Madame" in "Cassation" acts as a vehicle for the application of madame von Bartmann's sermon also to that story: do not look for one thing, look for everything. The relentless repetition of "everything" in both stories insists on the domain of excess and plenty that has been shown to characterize Barnes's writing: it portrays the excess in both pleasure and pain that life offers, tragedy and comedy included. Solemn tones are paired with the crisp parody of Socratic dialogue: "Do you know this?"; "Yes"; "How do you know?"; "I don't know."

On a symbolic level, knowledge and "everything" are paired with liberation: the young women of both stories are invited out of the paternal house to see the world. The functions of the mother figures, however, are different. While Madame von Bartmann urges Richter to experience everything, pushing her out of the house, as it were, Gaya ultimately wants Katya to stay in and content herself with the pleasures of a solipsistic nothingness: "there are no swans, no flowers, no beasts, no boys—nothing, nothing at all, just as you like it. No mind, no thought, nothing whatsoever else. […] no father, no mother no sisters, no brothers—only you, only you!" (*CS*, 391).[125] However, Katya refuses and moves on to tell her story to a "Madame." Readers know nothing of the inclinations of this silent character, but they might, based on the intratextual links, imagine her as more like Madame von Bartmann than Gaya; an accepting presence affirming Katya's "things are like that" with a sigh, perhaps. In the symbolic system created by these two stories, life equals everything: things, language, movement, pain, and pleasure. Its opposite is symbolized by the house that may contain things but no freedom or movement. The dominating mode of narration in "Cassation" is a gesture of showing everything performed by the narrator, but also ultimately by a virtual presence of an imaginary, embodied Djuna Barnes as the original mover of things (Oulanne 2017b). These gestures are also visible in the way embodied and spatial schemas are used across stories. Therefore, as a final example, we return briefly to a closer discussion of the fictional space, with which this study was begun.

The house of "Cassation" evokes the schema of containment, a sense of being shut in. Even the "everything" in it comes across as suffocating, as the "massive" furniture towers over the narrator, the "oppressive" coats of arms and other things signal "gloom" and "importance." However, at the same time, another schema of lightness

125 It is not clear whether this passage is addressed to Katya or Valentine, or both, yet its performative aim seems to be to make Katya stay and forget the "everything" of the world.

and openness is evoked by details that are less conspicuously present: there always seems to be a window open, and entering the house and leaving it appears easy, although at times unconventional. At night, coming back to the house for the first time, Katya climbs in through a window. In Valentine's bedroom, the feathers shiver in the wind coming "from the open window." At the end, coming to see Gaya and Valentine for the last time, Katya "went in quite easily by the door, for all the doors and windows were open" (*CS*, 392). Katya offers a matter-of-fact explanation: "perhaps they were sweeping that day" (Ibid..). This movement between indoors and outdoors is repeated in many other stories, as we have noticed in the discussions of "Spillway," "Aller et Retour," and "A Night among the Horses."

As Barnes's writing has often been linked to the processing of trauma (Grobbel 2004; Taylor 2012), the repetition of elements from one story to another can also be read in the light of trauma theories, as compulsory re-enactment. However, for the purposes of this chapter and this study, it has been more important to show that the repetitions are part of an internal system of meaning, which builds on embodied schemas as well as cultural and intertextual references, and that the particular aesthetics of these stories rest on the partial matching, partial clashing of these schemas. This does not attempt to be an interpretive key that would make the stories instantly intelligible and explain them away, as it were; here the intention has been to show some shared processes on which meanings can be built in the unique encounters between the text and its reader. Therefore, even if the "take-home message" of "Cassation" seems to be "this is everything there is," a reading can never finish with a similar statement.

In the analyses of this chapter, embodied cognitive approaches to reading and sense-making have been harnessed for the purpose of investigating the function of materiality in the production of meaning in selected pieces of short fiction. The common denominator of Rhys's and Barnes's stories has been, firstly, the way the material and nonhuman permeates the abstract and the human. In *The Left Bank,* people and things contribute to similar aesthetical, and ultimately also ethical aims, as they appeal to similar embodied processes of sense-making, while in Barnes's stories, especially "Cassation," abstract and symbolic meanings are built on embodied schemas in combination with other areas of meaning. The descriptive focus is different in the work of the two writers, and in neither case is it simply attributable to modernism or another period or style. However, a prevalence of description and material detail links both writers' work to how David Herman was seen to conceive of modernism as the interaction between a mind and a world, or, more likely, the enaction of both in their encounter. However matter-of-fact the narrators' description of the world, experience and embodiment still permeate the result, if not clearly in the fictional world, then as the contribution of the readers' history of being-in-the-world that they draw on when making sense of the things presented.

# Conclusion

# 6 Conclusion

This study has examined nonhuman things and materialities in the fiction of Djuna Barnes and Jean Rhys as narrative devices contributing to experientiality and as fictional agents with an affective presence and a role in various processes of interpretation and sense-making. The "livedness" of the things has been present in all these discussions. Things are bound to be steeped in their felt materiality, be it in the form of fictionalized experience undergone by a character, or in the way they interact with the reader's own experiential background of a lifetime of being-with-things.

The analyses have shown how the writers' critical commentary on the genderedness of private and public spaces and the intermingled experience of time draws on a production of experientiality in relation to the various materialities making up these spaces, and of the things used to express the experience of time. In the discussion of fetishism in the work of both writers, the lived materiality of things has been shown to complicate the notion of fetishism as a disavowal of lack and as a male phenomenon. Furthermore, drawing on anthropological and new materialist considerations of agency in communities and assemblages involving both human and nonhuman bodies, it is the materiality of the things as something that can be felt in the body of a reader that proves significant for the understanding and effect of the fictional passages. The agency of things in the stories can be conceptualized as the potential to affect, and the affective impact of the stories has been shown to rest on the sense experience they invite their reader to undergo. Finally, things have been seen to contribute to the production of meanings in the stories on several levels, from the appeal to basic embodied schemas to culturally informed, symbolic, and aesthetic interpretation and reflective, critical considerations of the ethical and political implications of the stories.

To disclose material things as simultaneously independent agents and participants in the lived experience of human being-in-the-world on which fictional texts draw, embodied and enactive approaches to cognitive narratology and philosophy of mind have been combined with new materialist thinking of things, materialities, affectivity and distributed agency. This study exemplifies an inescapable interdependence between a phenomenological and a materialist outlook: fictional things are approached through the means of understanding afforded by the human makings of the reader, but these makings are also profoundly entangled in the material world of things, from the materialities of human bodies to the reliance of human sense-making on the sensorimotor experience of the material world.

Despite these sweeping thematics and a broad array of theoretical approaches used to address them, the focus of this study has been on a small corpus of two writers' "small" texts, namely short stories. This has enabled a detailed focus required by reading fictional detail made up of references to materialities. Barnes's and Rhys's texts have already been read carefully by many researchers, but the analyses here have contributed to the understanding of their work from a different, two-fold perspective, namely that of material things and the specific narrative means of producing experientiality, on which the meanings teased out by various researchers often depend. Studying the singular can create understanding of broader phenomena, be they related to fictional devices or real-world relations with things. The analysis of how an interaction between a dress and a character in Rhys's "Let Them Call It Jazz" can be conductive of kinesthetic communication and empathy suggests a broadening of the scope of narrative empathy; the study of the abundance of things surrounding the child on the bed in Barnes's "Cassation" sheds light on the mutual constitution of the embodied, symbolic, aesthetic and cultural levels of sense-making involved in reading.

From the point of view of the study of the experientiality of fiction, the analyses have shown how the embodiedness of this experientiality relies on the material world of nonhuman bodies as experienced, and how it occasionally allows for the blurring of boundaries between the human and the nonhuman, by virtue of focalizing structures de-centered from fictional human bodies. On the other hand, the analyses highlight the multiple levels of consciousness and engagement in reading fiction: the simultaneous possibility of the embodied enactment of story-driven experiences afforded and invited by the events and existents in the storyworld, and the undergoing of the specific experience of *reading fiction,* with the reflective, aesthetic and ethical considerations involved. There is still much to be done in this vein of research, and the approaches used and developed in this study to examine the use of materialities in literary worldmaking can be applied to other fiction from other periods as well.

The analyses have contributed to the study of the writing of Djuna Barnes and Jean Rhys by pointing out how affirmative and reparative interpretations, which have arisen only recently in relation to their work, rely on basic embodied modes of sense-making, but are compatible with critical and ironic modes of reading. The stories of both writers use fictional things to create literary affordances for slight shifts in the readers' understanding based on habitual, tacit meanings: possibilities to broaden their conceptions of subjectivity, empathy, gendered identity, and the family. Experientially, readers

may undergo affective experiences of happiness induced by wearing nice clothes, moments of belonging built around a specific table-setting, an inkling of the talismanic power evoked by the right kind of boots and a cape, or the pleasure involved in a collection of intricate things and their cataloguing, while appreciating the gendered problems of objectification related to fashion, the precarity of happiness as a sociocultural phenomenon, the multiple troubling implications of modern fetishism and the individual symbolic potential of each item in a list.

From the point of view of modernism studies, the readings suggest that such embodied, material thematics and means of presentation are quite central in the work of two writers stylistically and spatio-temporally quite near the heart of Anglophone modernism, even though the focus on of things and materialities in previous studies has been rather marginal. As regards specifically short fiction, the readings show these short stories, sketches and vignettes as forms of writing in which the lived materiality of the world is brought to the fore, while features such as plot, psychological character study and even symbolism appear as secondary. They display a phenomenological interest in the way they tap into human experience of being-in-the-world and making sense of it with and through material things, even in the absence of characters with a "readable" mind. Significantly, the analyses reveal that modernist "object-relations" do not only display alienation; the dehumanizing tendencies of the texts suggest a paradoxical connectedness that encompasses the nonhuman world. Rhys's and Barnes's texts form a fruitful platform for experimentation with means of conveying and evoking glimpses of lived experience, a central concern in modernist fiction of the beginning of the 20th century, while also voicing critical concerns of the gendered order of things in the sociocultural context as well as in theoretical frameworks such as psychoanalysis. This study has shown that gendered experience, as imagined by two central modernist writers, is intermingled with the nonhuman, material world, and that materialities can afford empowerment and creativity as well as objectification and alienation.

Djuna Barnes and Jean Rhys invite the readers of their short fiction to live through intense experiences and a variety of fictional settings with touching, inviting, repellent, oppressive, intriguing, realistic and fantastic furnishings. Readers are dressed in 1920s black dresses, corseted, hatted, and veiled, taken on a crawl through thicket or a ride, walk or a run through a series of escapes from suffocating interiors. Simultaneously, they are provided with skillful organizations of words on a paper, the experience of holding a book in their hands, materially rooted in their own bodies and living-worlds, and reflecting on what they read. The fictional world, the real-world being of the reader and even the reading consciousness have something in common: the way the material and the cultural, the human and the nonhuman, the symbolic and the embodied are mutually constituted and permeated by one another.

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